Short Stories

LOVE WAR ADVENTURE ROMANCE PATHOS HUMOUR

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The Secret of the Crypt.

IN the midst of a wide tract of uncultivated land in southern California stands a ruined adobe house, once the patriarchal home of the Miramontes. One hundred years ago the valley, now dry and barren, was watered by streams flowing through aqueducts, clear and cool from the mountains, and great herds of cattle and flocks of sheep grazed on the luscious herbage. Where still stands some scraggy olive trees once grew a thrifty orchard, but not even a fallen trunk remains of the noble grove of live oaks in whose shade Don Federico Miramonte, the first owner of this vast estate, built a little chapel whose crumbling adobe walls sank into shapeless mounds of earth long ago.

At a little distance from the great house lived the labourers and servants, in primitive dwellings made of tules—reeds—brought from the marshes. The dimensions of Don Federico's estate were defined by an impregnable boundary line—a hedge of prickly cacti, planted to prevent the invasions of hostile Indians from the mountains. In some places the cacti have grown to an enormous height, flourishing in the midst of drought and desolation, while the people they were planted to protect and the Indians who were their foes have vanished from the earth.

One morning, in October, 1891, two young men rode towards the old adobe and stopped to rest in its shadow. One—dark-browed and sallow-skinned, with eyes like black beads—was Arturo Miramonte, Don Federico's only living descendant. The other was a young architect from England named Severson.

Evidently the scene was new to him, for, while the Spaniard sat on his horse and smoked his cigarettes in moody silence, looking neither to right nor left, the Englishman's eager eyes took in every detail of their surroundings. Twice he was about to speak, but the sight of his friend's melancholy countenance kept him silent; he knew Miramonte well enough to understand that he did not wish to be disturbed.

"Aye!" said the Spaniard at last. "*Valgame Dios!* It is a dreary scene! You see, my friend, all that remains!" He spoke slowly, choosing his words with care. Arturo Miramonte detested the language. "You can form no idea of the grandness that was once here. An avenue of palms led up to the house (they were cut down by the Americans), and the placita—the court there, señor, where you see the ruins of a fountain—was planted with flowers and tropical trees. Don Federico's servants made a village of themselves! At night, they say, when the moon shone, he would sit with his young wife under the arched porch yonder and watch the people dancing to the music of guitars and castanets. But his wife ran away with an Englishman, and Don Federico became suddenly an old man, and so morose that all his people feared him. You have heard the story?"

"No," answered Severson. "Let's go inside while you tell it."

"My great-grandfather's wife was very beautiful," continued Miramonte, as they walked across the neglected court, "not beautiful like our Spanish women, but with shining red hair and a white skin and soft brown eyes. He brought her with him when he came to this country, and no one knows the land of her nativity.

"He built this house for her and filled it with beautiful things—carpets from Persia (Don Federico had been a great traveller) and pictures and curtains and furniture from everywhere. He worshipped her instead of the Virgin. There was nothing he would not do for her. They were famous for their hospitality—you have heard of the hospitality of the Miramontes?—*si?*—and travellers never asked shelter there in vain.

"But one day Don Federico found his wife in the arms of an Englishman, who was their guest. Why he did not kill them both I do not understand. The servant heard her screams and prayers for mercy. That night the faithless woman disappeared with her lover, and Don Federico made no search for them. He forbade the mention of her name. He became a recluse, a cynic, a miser, and for thirty years he lived alone, ruling his people like a king, hoarding his money and growing richer every year. And then, as suddenly as

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he had retired from the world he entered it again. It was his purpose to marry, to provide heirs to his wealth——"

"But—the wife?" interrupted Severson.

Miramonte rolled another cigarette. "She disappeared with her lover," he repeated, "the night after her perfidy was discovered, and they were never heard of again. Don Federico made no effort to find them. He wished to forget her. He spoke of her but once. When he asked my great-grandmother's hand in marriage he told her that he had learned from an authentic source that his first wife was dead. Fate! He could have chosen any maiden in this country, for his wealth was great, and my great-grandmother was regarded as the most fortunate of women. She, too, came of pure Castilian blood, señor," and Miramonte looked up, with a gesture of pride. "It is good that the other wife bore no children. The Miramontes are without a taint.

"But, once wedded, Don Federico again withdrew from the world. A sad life she led—my great-grandmother. She bore him sons and daughters, and they all feared him more than they feared God or the devil. He seemed to care only to get money—to hoard it and hide it away. To this day people believe that there is money hidden in these ruins. You are amused, señor? You laugh?"

"Every ruin is said to conceal a treasure, you know," said Severson sceptically.

"*Vaya!*" replied the Spaniard, with apparent indifference. "Believe it or not, as you will; but searches have been made and money has been found—no matter! Don Federico lived to be ninety years old, and his wife was his slave, and his children were afraid to speak aloud in his presence. He had grandchildren, too—a sturdy brood. Strange that I alone am left! He would not permit them to learn the English language or recognise one who spoke it.

"You see, señor, I speak English with much care. I learnt it of necessity a few years ago. We Miramontes are born with a hatred of the English people and tongue. Don Federico would let no stranger cross his threshold, for he had no faith in women, and my great-grandmother dared never to speak to any man but her husband and the priest. Well, he died at last, and his heirs quarrelled among themselves, and in the end the place was sold to settle the dispute. And so it happened, señor, that this immense estate, which should now be mine, passed into the possession of aliens, and this house, which was built to shelter Don Federico's descendants for centuries, now stands empty and in ruins."

Severson, with his arms behind him, paced slowly through the deserted rooms. The walls were immensely thick. Each window made an alcove. The ceiling was broken where the roof had leaked, and the heavy tiles had fallen through; and patches of sky were visible here and there.

"Of course the place is haunted?" Severson queried, with a smile; "these old houses are always tenanted by ghosts."

Miramonte smoked vehemently for a moment. "The señor does not believe in ghosts?" he asked in non-committal tones.

"Well, hardly," answered Severson emphatically; "still I'd like to. It would make life intensely interesting. Do you?"

"Who can tell?" murmured the Spaniard, shrugging his shoulders; "I could tell you of things——" and he said nothing more. Severson extended his explorations, noting with growing admiration the immense solidity of the walls. Between two of the inner rooms he found a partition seven feet thick.

"Whew!" he whistled in amazement; "the old don built for all eternity—a seven foot wall!"

He struck it admiringly with his doubled fist, and to his surprise he heard a faint sound like falling mortar.

"Queer," muttered Severson; "it can't be very substantial after all," and he began to search for the defective spot. But, though he examined it on every side, the wall presented an unbroken surface. He struck again, and again he heard the mysterious sound.

"Miramonte!" he called excitedly; "Miramonte Come here!"

"What do you want?" the Spaniard replied, indolently rising from his seat on the floor in the farther room.

"Come here!" shouted Severson; "quick! I've made a discovery. This wall is hollow!"

Miramonte leapt to join him—not indolent now—his yellow face suffused, his eyes aflame.

"The money!" were his first words. "*Vive Dios!* the hidden money!"

Severson nodded affirmatively, and gave the wall another blow. "Listen, Miramonte," he said; "don't your hear the mortar falling inside? I tell you this wall is hollow. How shall we make a hole?"

Miramonte stood transfixed. "I hear, I hear," he murmured, in ecstasy, as if he were listening to celestial music. "Now—now, at last it will be found. I shall be rich once more."

"Think," urged Severson impatiently, "how to get inside. We have no tools."

"The roof!" cried the Spaniard. "My knife!—with my knife I can make an opening through the roof."

Instantly the two men ran out into the placita. Severson stopped to study the roof and fix in his mind the location of the inner room; but Miramonte, carrying his unsheathed hunting knife in his hand and trembling with eagerness, began at once to clamber over the fallen and mouldering outer walls.

"Be careful," cautioned Severson, "you'll break through the roof. The tiles are heavy; the beams are old and rotten. Be careful!" But the Spaniard scarcely seemed to hear.

Kneeling now upon the uneven roof he flung the loose tiles aside, and when Severson joined him he was hacking the tiles and rending the thongs that bound them together. Severson could hear him reiterating in Spanish while he worked: "The money—at last—the money!"

Soon a hole was made two feet in diameter. Miramonte thrust in his head till his shoulders rested upon the roof. Severson saw his body shake and heard him utter a hideous oath. "It is dark! I cannot see!" he cried aloud in a fury. "We must make the hole larger!" and he fell madly to work again.

At last the opening was four feet long. Miramonte's hands were bleeding; his face was smeared with perspiration and dirt. His eyes shone like smouldering coals. The dust which had accumulated for a century on the roof swirled in a cloud about them, and it was impossible to discern anything below. But gradually the dust settled, and slowly—how slowly! the air cleared, and the two men, kneeling on the verge of the opening they had made, gazed down into the apartment beneath them.

The Spaniard's face became ashen under its grime.

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His eyes were glassy and dull. "Virgin Santissima!" he whispered, slowly making the sign of the cross. "Mother of God! what do I see? *Dos Esqueletos!*"

Below them, in a narrow chamber—a mere cell, not four feet wide, without windows or doors—on a floor paved with square brick tiles, lay two skeletons, the skulls resting close together.

Looping his lariat round a rafter which crossed a hole in the roof, Severson lowered himself into the cell. Graven in Spanish upon a tablet in the wall, he read this legend:

"Here, shut in a living tomb, with her lover, is Don Federico Miramonte's faithless wife. Accursed be her soul."

LE VIER.

AN OYSTER SUPPER.

"WHEN I married I was a sort of Traddles; only I wasn't so heavily handicapped as Traddles, you see; for Cynthia had no sisters. My wife's a fine woman still, as you know; but when I married Cynthia, she was exceptionally pretty. It was rather a nuisance, because she was so good-looking that people used to turn round and stare at her, which always put the poor girl out of countenance. She certainly did her best not to attract attention; for we were horribly poor, and we had to be desperately economical in the matter of dress and in everything else. Why, many a time and oft has Cynthia cooked our little makeshift dinner of a couple of chops, or something equally economical, and cooked them well, too; there's no false pride about Mrs. Latitat."

Thus Latitat, Q.C., to me, as we sat in his handsome dining-room in Eaton Square. "I hate being under an obligation to a fellow," he continued; "but I've been under an obligation to a man for well-nigh twenty years. I borrowed money of him, you see," he added with a laugh, "and I wasn't able to get out of the debt till last week."

"I wonder how many times you've told me that you never borrowed a five-pound note in your life, Latitat," I said.

"Oh, I didn't borrow a five-pound note; the man obliged me under very peculiar circumstances, and from the night he came to my assistance till last week I have never set eyes upon him.

"We were living in Tarfield Court, fourth floor, and Sparkler Jones had given me two stalls for the Olympic. Poor old Sparkler! He was at the height of his success as a dramatic author. They didn't pay dramatic authors then as they do now; but he was doing very well indeed, and he admired Cynthia very much—in a respectful sort of way, of course—and gave us more seats than we knew what to do with. Cabs were a terrible item to us in those days, you know. But it wasn't a *sine quâ non* at that time to wear evening dress when you sat in the stalls. That's what I liked stalls for then. It enabled one to walk home.

"I took Cynthia to the Olympic, and we saw a burlesque of Jones's—*The Vampire Re-vamped*, I think it was called—and Glumper, the low comedian, played the Vampire, and sang a song with a chorus of 'I must have blood or I'll bust'; we both laughed till we cried. I don't suppose we should either of us laugh now at *The Vampire Re-vamped* — twenty years makes a wonderful difference. Well, we walked down the Strand after the play, for we were both hungry, and I had promised Cynthia an oyster supper. It was a tremendous piece of extravagance for me then; but oysters were only ninepence a dozen, and we were both desperately fond of them; so we went to R——'s in Maiden Lane, and we sat down in one of the boxes, and we ordered our oysters and our brown bread-and-butter and our stout. There was rather a flashily-dressed man supping at the box opposite to us. There he sat swallowing his oysters, with which he drank the most expensive Chablis they'd got in the place. I don't myself approve of Chablis with oysters—I prefer stout—and in those days I had to prefer stout."

"Well, we'd got through our modest four dozen, we had eaten our brown bread-and-butter, we had finished our stout. 'Waiter,' I said, 'what do we owe?'

"'Three-and-two,' replied the waiter.

"I felt in my pocket. Not a penny-piece.

"'Lend me your purse, my dear,' I said to my wife. She hadn't brought it with her.

"The waiter was a greasy and offensive-looking ruffian, and he grinned sarcastically. Of course, I had to eat humble pie.

"'I'm very sorry, waiter,' I said; 'I've left my purse at home. There is my card. I'll look round and settle in the morning, and you shall have a shilling for yourself.'

"'I knowed it,' said the waiter; 'I twigged ye when I saw ye come in. We've lots of customers like you. You'd better leave yer watch,' he added drily, 'and you can look round and settle in the morning,' he went on insolently, echoing my phrase.

"I was so angry I could have thrashed the fellow within an inch of his life; but there was nothing for it but to do as he suggested. I put my hand to my pocket; my watch was gone!

"I was dumfounded. I explained matters to the waiter. He got between me and the door at once.

"'You don't leave this place until you've settled, guv'nor,' he said brutally; he said a great deal more which I'll not repeat. I couldn't resent it, you know, and I thought my poor little Cynthia would have died of shame.

"Then the over-dressed man in the opposite box came to our assistance.

"'You infernal rascal,' he cried, addressing the waiter; 'what do you mean by insulting the gentleman?

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I've half a mind to break every bone in your body;' and he looked as if he could do it too. Then he pulled out a fat pocket-book. 'Take it out of that, you scoundrel,' he said, producing a ten-pound note, 'and look alive with the change. Take my supper out of it, too; and let me tell you, you scamp, that you've lost a customer. You'll never see my face again.'

"The waiter departed, and then the over-dressed man began to sympathise, and Cynthia thanked him through her tears. I thanked him, too; and, of course, I insisted on giving him my card."

Then Mr. Latitat fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and produced the identical card.

"At one time," said Latitat, "I did a fair amount of criminal business. I was very glad indeed when I drifted out of it and into commercial cases, which, of course paid very much better. I wasn't half so much before the general public; all you saw of me in the newspapers, as a rule, was 'with him Mr. Latitat,' whereas in my early days there would be a long account, and often a verbatim report of 'the impassioned speech for the prisoner.' But the prisoner was very seldom indeed good for more than three guineas, and the shady attorneys, who were the favourite thieves' lawyers in those days, were very bad paymasters, who generally took long credit, and often never settled at all. But there was any amount of glory; whereas in the heavy commercial cases, 'with him Mr. Latitat' generally meant a fifty-guinea brief at the very least.

"I was breakfasting the other morning, when my man came in and said a person of the name of Pouter wished to see me, and that he would take no denial. I went to my study and saw the person of the name of Pouter. I had never seen Mr. Pouter before, but directly he opened his mouth I knew that he was a fourth-rate solicitor.

"'I've called to ask you to come down to-day to the Central Criminal, sir, to defend an unfortunate client of mine. I went to your chambers first, sir—indeed I did,' said Mr. Pouter.

"I got up at once. 'My good sir,' I said, 'I don't accept briefs on the criminal side any longer; and this visit is exceedingly irregular,' I added.

"'I told him so,' replied Mr. Pouter; 'I told him it was no use, but he insisted that you would come down, and he said that I was to give you this, sir; and he told me that I was just to say, "Oysters," which, I conclude, is a sort of sign or token.'

"Then he handed me this old card of mine: Mr. John Latitat, 2, Tanfield Court, Temple. My first chambers' Oysters? Oysters?

"'My client said,' began Mr. Pouter, with an oily smile, 'that he had had the pleasure of entertaining you and Mrs. Latitat at an oyster supper.'

"Then it came back to me in an instant. 'Sit down,' I said, 'who is your client?'

"'Party of the name of Quelch, alias Wheable. Been "in trouble" before; accused of "smashing."'

"I may tell you that 'smashing' means the passing of bad money. I accepted the brief Mr. Pouter handed to me; it was a three-guinea brief. My clerk would have turned up his nose at anything marked under twenty.

"I went down to the Central Criminal Court. A friend of mine was trying the coining cases as Commissioner in the Second Court. You don't often see a Q.C. in the Second Court at the Old Bailey. I and Gasper, Q.C., who was on the Bench trying these Mint cases, were the only silk gowns present. There was a crowd of the usual hacks and 'soupmen.' They all stared at me in astonishment. I found that Waggle, who gets his living mostly as a journalist, was retained with me for form's sake; a Q.C. cannot go into Court, you know, without a learned junior.

"I had read my brief in the cab. They work off an ordinary coining case, as a rule, in about a quarter of an hour. At ten minutes to one the Queen *versus* Quelch was called, and my client, a dreadfully shabby old man, was put to the bar. As he entered the dock he greeted me with a grateful wink.

"I got the man off on a technical point. They found him not guilty, and my friend Gasper, from the bench, said he hoped it would be a warning to him. Mr. Quelch walked out of the dock a free man.

"As I emerged into the Old Bailey I saw the poor old creature waiting for me on the pavement.

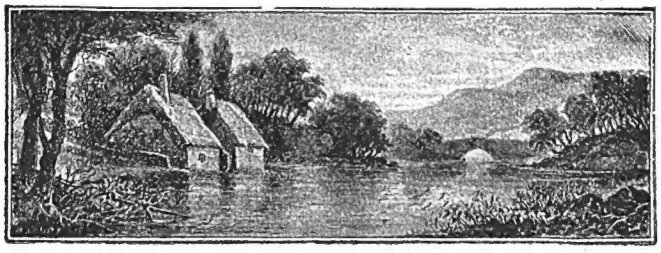
"'You did the bloomin' trick, guv'nor,' he said in a voice hoarse with gratitude and drink. 'It ain't the fust time as I have been in trouble, sir; but I hadn't got a mag to call my own to pay a counseller.'

"He was a dreadful-looking old man, aged before his time with vice and crime. I offered him a sovereign, and I thanked him for his kindness of twenty years ago. He waved the sovereign off.

"'Bless ye, guv'nor,' he said, 'I couldn't take it,' and then he winked knowingly. 'Do you know, guv'nor,' he said with a pleased air, 'that ten quid flimsy you helped me to pass at the oyster-shop was a duffer, too.'

"Then he gave me a patronising nod and disappeared into the crowd."

Ethel Dicey.



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THE MUFF OF THE REGIMENT.

"The new sub's arrived."

"Ah! What kind of a sort of a Johnnie is he?"

"Delicate, very delicate, and refined, quite refined. Doesn't smoke, doesn't drink—further particulars about himself when he's reported safe arrival to his 'mater.'"

"Oh, he's that sort, is he? Poor beggar!"

"You may well say that, Chilcott. The Royal Raspers have got a pretty fair record inscribed on their ragged colours, but their pre-eminent characteristic is rowdiness, and it's generally conceded to be the roughest regiment in the line for a youngster."

Foremost among Tibbits' tormentors was a certain Trafford Daunt, the senior lieutenant of his company. Daunt never lost an opportunity of "scoring off" him at mess, on parade, or elsewhere.

"Confound it, old chap," said Chilcott, one day, "you ought not to lead that poor little chap quite such a life. You are so remarkably down on him. It's hard lines on him. You are taking it out of poor Tibbits with a vengeance. What makes me so sorry for him is that he's a good-natured little chap. When I asked him why he didn't chuck your bull terrier out of his bedroom window he said it might hurt your feelings."

"My feelings!" shrieked Daunt. "Why the pup would have eaten him—slippers and all. Well, that beats cockfighting!"

At last an event occurred which led to a temporary cessation of the sub-lieutenant's troubles. But the interest in him somewhat revived when, with the Raspers aboard, the huge "trooper" glided like a grey spectre down the Solent, for Tibbits succumbed to *mal de mer* before the Horseshoe and Spit Forts had been passed.

"Bad, Tibby, old man?" asked Sub-Lieutenant Chilcott, as he laid a kindly hand on the shoulder of the inert heap of pallid humanity.

"I'm dreadfully bad, Chilcott. I—I say—if anything should happen you wouldn't mind sending my gold watch home to the mater. It was—was my dad's."

"Stuff! You'll be all right directly; try a brandy and soda—or, better still, eat an apple."

"Now, is that one of those jokes?" smiled Tibbits feebly.

"No, really," said the good-natured Chilcott.

"Don't you believe Chilly," shouted Daunt, joining them. "Look here, Tib, old man, ask the steward to fry you a pork chop, or some sausages, or try a few sardines -ha, ha, ha!" for the wretched Tibbits had risen and staggered out of sight.

* * * * * * *

Great was the elation of the Royal Raspers when within three months of their landing on the bank of the Hoogly they received orders to join an expedition proceeding up country for the purpose of "restoring order" in certain villages where an indiscreet Commissioner and a fanatical priest, in their endeavours to thwart each other, had between them managed to stir up a mutiny in miniature.

And the joy of the Raspers knew no bounds when, on reaching the disturbed area they found they were not "too late for the ball," that in all probability the warmest of the work was yet to come.

At last after a series of long and arduous forced marches the brigade, of which the Raspers formed the right wing, came upon the rebel stronghold, a well-fortified camp on the edges of an arid plain.

The enemy stubbornly refused to yield to the blandishments of the brigade, and "have it out" in the open, and for a time Gatlings and Maxim Nordenfeldts plied their rattling belch in vain upon the earthworks and bastions from behind which the rebels poured a fire that compelled the attackers to keep at a distance.

At last the Brigadier determined on a ruse. Orders were given for a feigned attack, and presently a "galloper" dashed up to order the Raspers to send forward two companies in open order.

Like slipped greyhounds they leapt from their cover and dashed forward, extending as they went till at last they formed a long skirmishing line, advancing, flopping, and firing, advancing, flopping, and firing, advancing again, and so on, till they were within some four hundred yards of the earthworks.

It was then that the rebels took the old soldier's bait. Out from the entrenchments streamed a powerful sortie bent on sweeping the thin line of skirmishers off the plain. Quickly the bugle pealed out a recall, and the Raspers stubbornly retired towards their base, turning, and kneeling at every sixth pace to take shots.

Meantime, the left wing of the attacking force was wheeling into position for a flank attack, but so hotly did the rebel sortie press forward that the captains of the two companies of Raspers, drawing their swords, held them aloft, and gave the word to rally.

Instantly the skirmishers rushed back and grouped themselves with fixed bayonets around their officers, who gave the command for independent firing.

"Hullo!" cried Chilcott, looking across the plain, "Daunt's hit—he's down! Poor beggar, it'll be all up with him if we're not reinforced. Steady, lads, give it 'em hot. By Jove! who's that helping Daunt along, and hoisting him on his back? By Jove! it's Tibby! Come on, Tibby, sharp! Just in time. Ah!"

For just as the huddled ranks opened to let in Tibbits staggering under his burden, the Muff of the regiment fell prone upon his face with a bullet between his ribs.

They dragged the two wounded men within the *chevaux de frise*, and a great cheer went up as from the left and the rear reinforcements swept up, and the rebels, perceiving the trap, turned and scuttled like rabbits for their burrows.

An hour later the officers of the Royal Raspers gathered round a prostrate form. It was Tibbits. Daunt, his leg in splints, held one hand, Chilcott the other.

"How is it now, old chap?" asked the latter, bending over the fast paling face.

Slowly on the silence came the feeble whisper:

"It's bad—in one way, but it's all right. I'm done for."

"Oh Heavens!" groaned Daunt with the first tears in his eyes those there had ever seen. "And for me—who was such a brute to you."

"No, no." With waning strength Tibbits pressed his comrade's hand. "I always knew—it was only—fun. I loved all you fellows—Chilly, send my watch to the mater—tell her——"

* * * * * * *

Yes. When Chilcott placed in the gentle lady's hand the watch dented by her son's death bullet, he told her how the Raspers with one voice confessed that they had lost in her boy one of the noblest hearts that ever beat beneath their war-worn colours.

Henry Johnson.

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When the Birds Begin to Sing

By Winifred Graham. *Author of "Through the Valley," "Six First-Class Passengers," etc.*

CHAPTER I.

And when Love Speaks.

She was certainly very pretty, and just then she looked prettier than usual, for the sharp run had brought a more vivid colour to the cheek, and an added sparkle to the eye. She was laughing, too—the rogue—as well she might, for had she not brought her right hand swiftly down upon his left ear when he had chased her, caught her, and deliberately and maliciously kissed her, and did he not now look red and foolish, and apparently repentant?

"Come and play wif us."

But let me start from the beginning, and tell you how it all came about.

* * * * * * *

Eleanor, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer, is as fresh and beautiful in the eyes of Philip Roche as the field flowers whose heads fall fading beneath his tread while he follows her through the long grass. He has watched her playing with the innocent school children—little more than a child herself—and then, with the calm assurance that to him is second nature, joins the merry throng unasked. The children greet him eagerly, after scrambling for a handful of silver from the stranger's pocket, for is it not the great, grand treat of all the year?

"Come and play wif us," lisps a little maiden of five summers, whom Philip tosses on to his shoulder with good-natured ease. He has a way of winning the confidence of children.

"What is the game?"

"Kiss in the ring!" cries a small boyish voice at his elbow.

The stranger's eyes twinkle as he watches the lovely unknown Eleanor arranging a circle. Placing his tiny friend again on her feet, and taking her brother's grimy hand, Philip Roche joins the hilarious pastime.

Eleanor glances across the ring well-pleasedly, guessing that her dainty figure and deep-fringed eyes have attracted him thither.

A moment later she trips lightly round the chain of children, her heart beating higher as her feet approach the man's tall figure. Shall she? Shall she? No time to consider, as the handkerchief falls from her hand upon Philip's shoulder.

Quick as lightning she flies away—faster—faster—through the buttercups, while he pursues, nearer—nearer—and then the strong arms arrest her career, and the inevitable kiss occurs.

Eleanor, her cheeks aflame, frees

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Faster—faster—through the buttercups.

herself from his audacious caress, and half laughing, half indignant, walks hastily away. But after their unconventional introduction Philip is not easily to be foiled.

"You are offended," he cries penitently. "It was only the game; won't you forgive me, Miss——?"

"Grebby," raising her eyes and pausing. "Eleanor Grebby," she continues with a prim little air that is quite unnatural, then laughing spontaneously:

"You see, I was rather taken aback at first, Mr.——"

"Roche—Philip Roche, at your service."

"So now we know each other," holding out her hand.

He grasps it eagerly—such a warm little slim hand!

"It was rather a nice introduction, wasn't it?"

Philip thinks how amazingly pretty Eleanor is, as she assents with deepening colour.

"There! I knew it would come!" she cries, with a thought for her new poppy-bedizened hat.

"What?" asks Philip, still feasting his eyes on the girl's fair physique, and unobservant of the gathering darkness overhead.

"Why, the rain, of course. We shall get wet."

"Only a summer shower."

"Yes, but as disastrous in its effects as any other downpour. I shall make for that barn in the next field; the children have all mysteriously vanished."

"I am dreadfully afraid of the wet," declares Philip, pretending to shiver. "May I accompany you?"

He is still retaining her hand as they run together towards the haven of shelter.

"How nice of it to rain!" he gasps, applauding the accommodating skies. "Let me make you comfortable," heaping together a pile of hay for her to sit upon. "Now tell me all about yourself."

Eleanor sinks down on the soft couch, looking somewhat wistfully through the open door of the barn.

"I am easily explained. I live here always. My father is a farmer, and I feed the chickens, dust the house, and teach in the Sunday-school. Only fancy what an exciting life, Mr. Roche. Doesn't it take your breath away?"

At the thought of her own humdrum existence Eleanor laughs again with a return of that superabundant vitality which is hers by nature.

"Then once or perhaps twice a year I am invited to tea at the Vicarage, and I sit up straight in a high-backed chair and say 'Yes' and 'No' when I am spoken to, and answer prettily—like a schoolgirl. The vicar's wife would have a fit if I lounged like this," flinging herself back with an air of abandon on the hay. "Once she asked me to sing (I play the harmonium in church). My cousin Joe had brought me a comic song from town, and I couldn't help for the life of me getting up and giving her a verse.

"Of course it was wrong, and she looked frightfully shocked. I have certainly never been invited to tea since. Oh, how I should like to sing at concerts and halls—I mean the sort of places where you have an eyeglass, and walk round with a hat and stick!"

Her face beamed as she delivered this sentence—involuntarily the little hands clasped themselves together in excitement.

"Be thankful that such an ambition is ungratified," declares Philip, speaking seriously for the first time. "You do not know the fate that you are coveting. Rest contented, child, to remain your own sweet self. Your country life is ideal compared with—*that!*"

Eleanor shakes her head.

"It doesn't seem like it," she declares.

"No; I dare say not. Duty is sometimes heroism in its noblest form."

"Then are all the people wicked that go to London, and sing, act, and enjoy themselves?"

"Indeed I trust not. We should have a pretty bad time of it if they were. Yet I don't know that you're far wrong. Few are guileless. But why talk of it? Time enough to warn you of the pitfalls when you are on your road to the great city."

"What is your life?" asks Eleanor curiously, drawing the long ends of hay through her teeth with a meditative smile.

"Scarcely less monotonous than yours, Miss Grebby"—an amused look in his eyes. "Instead of feeding chickens I feed my friends—lunches, dinners, midnight suppers—all of which pall terribly after a time. Instead of dusting my

Eleanor sinks down on the soft couch.

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house I leave it to accumulate dust, while I wander abroad. A home is a dull place for one man."

"You have no wife or mother?"

"No."

"But you must have lots of money. Why, only think of all the silver you threw to the children this afternoon! I do not believe they had ever seen so many shillings and sixpences before."

"Money will not buy a mother or——" He was going to say "a wife," but checked himself. Philip Roche was an accurate man.

"Poor Mr. Roche, it must be very lonely," says Eleanor, with genuine sympathy in her tone.

He smiles enigmatically. It is strange to him to be pitied by the little farmer's daughter when so many have envied his happy-go-lucky existence ere now.

"The rain clouds are dispersing," he murmurs, as a stray ray of sunlight wanders through the barn door to mingle its glory with Eleanor's hair. How gold those tender silken threads appear under its burnishing hand!

"What a pity! It has been such a refreshing shower!"

"I feel quite young again," he declares, "young enough to play with the children for hours. What do you say to kiss in the ring again?"

He presses her hand gently.

She lifts her eyes to his with a slow shake of her head.

"There is the vicar's wife to be considered."

"Good gracious!" he laughs. "You don't mean I should have to kiss her?"

Eleanor's face dimples all over in delightful smiles.

"What an absurd idea!" she gasps gleefully. "I should just like to see you!"

"I don't think it has *quite* stopped," murmurs Philip, holding up his hands to the sky, and pretending the drops from the barn are rain themselves.

"How silly you are!" cries Eleanor mockingly, gathering up her skirts and revealing a well-turned ankle. "But, oh, isn't the grass soaking?" as Philip takes her arm and guides her to a narrow path. "The children will ruin their boots, and all go home with colds. Look, they are tearing about like mad things. How they will sleep to-night!"

"I wonder what will become of them all in the years to follow, and why they have any existence whatsoever beneath the glimpses of the moon?"

"One will reap," replies Eleanor wisely, "and another will sow. Some may slay oxen and wring the fowls' necks, and perhaps for all we know murder each other. It is a horrible thought, isn't it? They look so thoroughly innocent, these country children. Do you see that little boy crying because he was knocked down in the three-legged steeplechase. His life race is only just beginning. His father is in gaol for theft, his mother incurable in a Samaritan infirmary, yet he is only crying because he grazed his knee and did not win a packet of bull's-eyes."

Eleanor's voice is low and expressive as her deep sapphire eyes—fascinating the man by their changeful beauty—one moment light and dancing like the sunbeams in the branches, the next overflowing with pity for a pauper child.

The little ones gather round, clinging to her skirts. She is tender and kind to all, though her gaze rests chiefly on the tall, sunburnt stranger making himself popular with the youngsters in her class.

"Look, teacher," cries the same wee maiden who is responsible for Philip's first appearance in their games. "I won 'er, 'opping along o' Margery in the big race," holding aloft a doll with great staring glass eyes and brilliantly rouged cheeks. "Ain't she beautiful?"

"What will you name her?" asks the Sunday-school teacher sweetly.

"Don't know," sighs the child perplexedly.

"Eleanor," suggests Philip.

"We 'ad a little sister named Eleanor, but she 'adn't got enough blood in her, so she died."

"Then you must call your doll by another name," says Miss Grebby decidedly.

But the small girl shakes her head, and announces with precision:

"I'll call 'er Eleanor!" and marches away well satisfied, to re-open a half-closed wound in her mother's breast.

"I hit on an unfortunate suggestion," whispers Philip, while the ever energetic Miss Grebby initiates him into the mysteries of "Nuts in May," "Poor Mary sits a-weeping," and "I have a little dog."

The soft twilight gradually creeps over this summer world, and the great red sun sinks down in its sea of fire behind the trees.

The birds chirp a good-night song, till their piping is drowned by the hearty cheers of the happy children ringing out stirringly on the still damp air.

"And now—home!" sighs Eleanor, with a little grimace, as Philip bends down to fasten a spray of wild honeysuckle in her belt.

"May I see you back?" he asks eagerly, noting the bright smile that flits across her lips at the suggestion.

"*Could* you walk a mile?" questions Eleanor in mock astonishment. "I thought London people always drove. The vicar's wife had some friends from South Kensington who were positively lame if they went any distance on foot. They said our country roads were a disgrace—no asphalte, no hansom cabs."

"Come along," murmurs Philip, whose long strides are not easy to keep pace with. They walk more slowly when out of sight. Oh, the delightful dawdle back through the vague shadows of evening in sweetly scented lanes! How merrily she prattles with charming ingenuousness, while he watches her expressive features, a new strange thrill at his heart.

What if on this summer holiday, among the clover and the daisies, he has discovered the one spotless soul of his life—a fresh, unsophisticated creation of Nature's noblest and purest art!

At last they are in sight of the old farmhouse which Eleanor calls home. It is a picturesque spot, and Philip stops admiringly to take in the beauty of the rural scene.

"So you live there in that quiet abode?" he said thoughtfully.

"Yes. I am sorry to-day is over. It has not only been a holiday for the children, but half the village. The labourers are to have a dinner to-night and——"

She paused. The labourers and the children are so far from her mind at this moment.

"I shall see you again," he whispers.

"Where and when?" asks Eleanor, feigning surprise.

"To-morrow in this cornfield on our left. I shall walk past."

"Like Boaz, and Ruth will be gleaning," she replies coyly.

"What will Boaz do?" he murmurs.

Eleanor lowers her eyes, and interlaces her fingers.

"I know," she replies confidently.

In the dim light Philip fancies that Eleanor is weaving some strange witchcraft. He is drawn involuntarily nearer, and snatching her hand detains it a moment in both his. She is more beautiful than ever now in the dim solitude of the deserted road. The simplicity of her daily routine in the country farmhouse appeals to this man of the world, who yearns for something different, something better in his aimless, empty life—aimless because he has no one to work for, empty because there is no one to love.

Eleanor's gentle presence in the gathering gloom quickens his imagination. A picture wonderful and hitherto undreamed rises like a sudden mirage before Philip's eyes.

He seems lost in contemplation.

"I have found her at last," he says, speaking his thoughts aloud.

"Who?" asks Eleanor under her breath.

"The Ideal Woman!" he replies.

The girl looks perplexed—she does not understand the

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phrase. New Women and rational costumes have not yet penetrated to the depths of Copthorne, so their counterpoising ideal is to her an unknown quantity.

Eleanor's ignorance of modernity constitutes a special charm in his eyes. How sweet a privilege to build up this

Brightening the pewter dinner service.

uncultured soul, to mould her impressionable spirit! Philip is enamoured of the idea; he sees such vast possibilities stretching out before him. Eleanor differed so widely from the women of his set. Perhaps the weaker sex are made variously that the mind of desultory man, studious of change, and pleased with novelty, may be indulged.

"How long have we known each other?" he asks.

"About three hours," she answers promptly.

"How deep can one go below the surface in one hundred and eighty minutes?"

Eleanor seems bewildered; she is at a loss for words.

"Have I only been with you so short a time?" he says incredulously. "Can it be possible?"

"Does it seem long?" she asks looking down shyly. "Have I wearied you, Mr. Roche?"

His smile reassures her.

"It does not seem *long*, only *full* to the brim. To every second a fresh thought, an inch deeper into the unknown."

"I have never met anyone before," she declares frankly, "who spoke to me like that."

Then with a swift "Good-night" Eleanor breaks away and vanishes among the shadows.

"A wife," says Philip to himself, "is something between a hindrance and a help. Is this the turn of the tide?"

A nightingale broke into song. "Yes!" it cried; "yes—yes—yes!"

CHAPTER II.

"Imparadis'd in One Another's Arms."—*Milton.*

Eleanor is busy in the morning sunlight, brightening the pewter dinner service, the pride of the Grebby family, passed down from generation to generation, and priceless in her eyes. She can hear the preparations without for an early start to the neighbouring market. Her mother is loading a cart of vegetables, while her father "shoos" the cackling geese into wicker pens, and harnesses "Black Bess," the steady old mare, who is almost one of themselves. And Eleanor is glad that the market (a weekly centre of attraction to the whole village) will leave her in peaceful solitude.

She breaks out into a glad song, which mingles with the twittering of birds.

"There was a jolly miller once,
Lived on the river Dee."

"Eleanor, Eleanor, give me a hand with these vegetables," cries her mother's voice. There is a thud, and a whole sack of potatoes fall pell-mell into the yard, still muddy from yesterday's rain.

Eleanor gathers them up, indulging the same tuneful mood.

"He worked and sang from morn till night,
No lark more blithe than he!"

She has a strong, sweet-toned voice, and "Black Bess" turns her head sleepily at the sound, whisking the tiresome flies with her tail. So often Eleanor's tread at the door of her shed has meant apples and carrots and sugar.

She wipes the potatoes clean with her apron, replacing them carefully at the back of the cart.

Mrs. Grebby takes the reins, while Mr. Grebby follows on foot, driving a few specially honoured sheep, who frequently serve him for conversation throughout an entire evening spent smoking with neighbouring farmers.

Eleanor watches them out of sight, her hand over her brow to shade the dazzling sunlight from her eyes. A group of chickens congregate around her with mute inquiry in their beaky faces. She fetches a handful of grain from the barn, flings it into their midst, and returns singing to her pewter polishing.

"And this the burden of his song
For ever used to be:

"How dull this soup tureen is, to be sure!" pausing in the verse to rub it with extra vigour.

"I care for nobody, no not I,
If no one cares for me!"

The delinquencies of the dimmed soup tureen are forgotten as these last words ring out in the quiet parlour. "Surely," thinks Eleanor, "there is hidden pathos in the Jolly Miller of Dee's reckless assertion! To care for nobody! What a horrible thought—a whole life's tragedy lies in the closing verse. If no one cares for me!"

Eleanor sighs and leans her chin on her hands, kneeling before the wooden table on which the dinner service is spread. What if nobody cared for her! How vast and miserable a wilderness this world would be! Why, even the dumb animals love her.

The little goat she called Nelly, who fell ill the week before, and gasped out its breath in her arms on a dry heap of hay, gave all the love of its disputed soul to Eleanor. Of course, it had a soul; she made up her mind long ago on this point. How can a creature with such mysteriously human eyes as Nelly possessed be less human than the great plodding, loose-mouthed ploughboy, who only gapes when he is spoken to, and contains what Mr. Grebby is pleased to call, "only half a intellec'!"

Eleanor glances at the old-fashioned clock in the corner, decorated by grotesque pottery dogs and four-legged creatures with horns, and faces resembling tigers or cats. She has been up since five, for besides market day it is churning morning, and she and her mother have worked for hours in the dairy. The rattle of traps on their way to the village with goods to sell still can be heard without. One old man cries as he goes along for the benefit of the chaise behind him:

"Greengages, penny a pound,
All the year round!"

Eleanor laughs, leans out of the window, shaking her fist at him.

"What an absurd old man!"

"Bring me ten pounds on the 1st of January," she cries. The old man grins to himself as his pony breaks into a slow trot, carrying his master out of earshot.

Then Eleanor glances again at the fleeting moments.

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Glancing at her reflection in a cracked glass.

Tick! tick! tick! How slowly the hand of the clock moves round.

"It is time," she says at last, washing her small hands under the scullery tap, and reaching for a hat hanging on the kitchen dresser.

"I wish I had something pretty to wear," she sighs, glancing at her reflection in a cracked glass. "Laces and ribbons, beautiful blue ribbons with pink spots, like the Squire's nieces wore last Sunday. The tall girl was dreadfully plain, and I should have looked so well in her silk gown, with the shorter sister's chiffon fichu."

Eleanor's face brightens at the recollection of those costumes in the Manor House pew, which appeared so lovely in her eyes while she played the Magnificat. Dreams of dainty dresses are as dear to her heart as the occasional thoughts of love which steal over her at times. "If the two could be combined," she thinks, "love and wealth."

It is amazing, this new and sudden desire for something better, which all but stops the beating of Eleanor's heart.

"If he loved me," she gasps, "*if*—" she staggers back against the half-closed door, her fingers clenched and pressed to her temples, throbbing with intense excitement. All the thoughts that crowd to her brain are offsprings of that improbable "if," each moment growing more dazzling!

She hastens with light footsteps to an old cupboard in which her mother has treasured some hand-made lace left in her aunt's will to the Grebbys of Copthorne Farm.

She turns down her collar to reveal a shapely throat, pearly white, and hidden usually from the sun's scorching power, round which the soft folds of lace fall entrancingly.

What would Eleanor's mother say could she see her precious heirloom donned hastily on this busy market morning, to adorn her daughter's neck for a stroll through the fields! It is sacrilege surely, but the prize!

The girl closes the cupboard noiselessly, creeping away like a criminal out into the glaring day. Her eyes dance, her cheeks are flushed, and her hair escaping (as if by accident) from its neat braids, waves in dainty tendrils round her ears.

"I *am* beautiful," she murmurs to herself, "why not? Stranger things have happened—Eleanor Roche, the wife of a rich man—oh!"

The last is a gasp of hitherto unexpressed surprise at the audacity of her day dreams.

Philip is waiting by the barley field, watching for her. As she sees him she slackens her steps, not wishing to appear over anxious for the rendezvous. He advances eagerly, grasps her hands, and devours her with his eyes.

"So we meet again, Eleanor," he whispers. "I *must* call you Eleanor; you don't mind?"

A bold answer that inwardly makes her tremble enters the girl's head. Why not place herself on an equality with him at once? She nerves herself to reply:

"Not if I may call you Philip?"

A look of amused surprise flits over Mr. Roche's features. What a naïve, childlike manner Eleanor possesses!

"Of course," he replies, pulling the small hand through his arm, and turning out of the public thoroughfare.

"Come where the honeysuckle grows," he says softly, "and let us talk."

"I wonder what you think of me?" asks Eleanor unhesitatingly.

The great sparkling eyes are raised to his with genuine curiosity in their depths. She is not seeking a compliment; far from it, she really wants to know, and is waiting for the truth.

He looks from the blue eyes of the girl to the little blue bird's-eye growing on a bank of clover. She pauses while he stoops to gather the tiny flower.

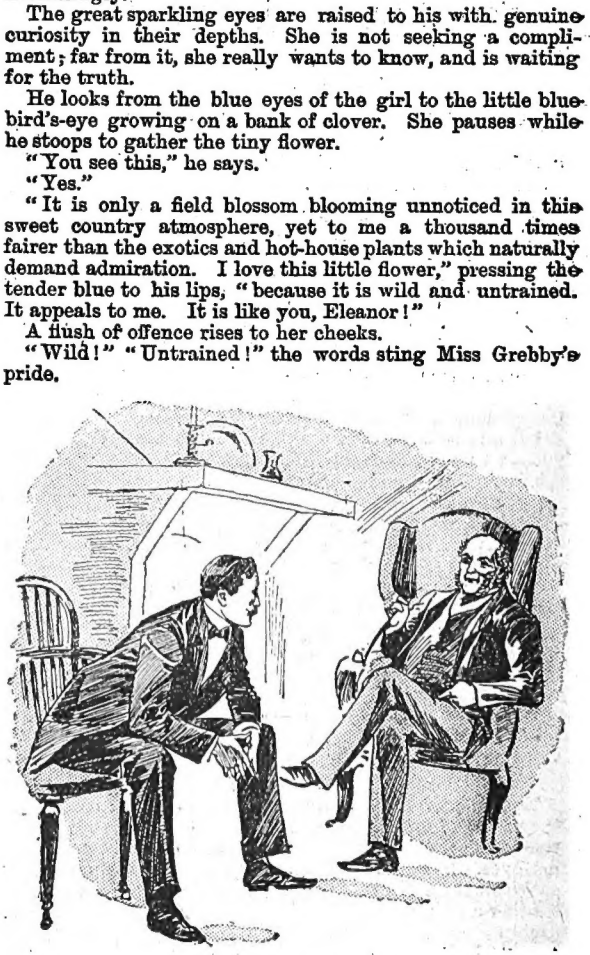
"You see this," he says.

"Yes."

"It is only a field blossom blooming unnoticed in this sweet country atmosphere, yet to me a thousand times fairer than the exotics and hot-house plants which naturally demand admiration. I love this little flower," pressing the tender blue to his lips, "because it is wild and untrained. It appeals to me. It is like you, Eleanor!"

A flush of offence rises to her cheeks.

"Wild!" "Untrained!" the words sting Miss Grebby's pride.



Discussing the crops and the weather with her father.

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"I did not think you would compare me to a *weed!*" she retorts, tossing her head proudly.

But Philip will not see he has offended, and continues in the same strain.

"Don't despise the weeds, Eleanor, they were placed in their uncultivated beds by Nature's hand, and have as much right to be called beautiful as any other creation."

He speaks to her authoritatively, and she looks at his strong, masterful expression with a gradual sense of awe.

"I should not have thought you would care for flowers."

"Why not? Does it seem childish in your eyes to soliloquise over a wayside 'weed,' as you call it?"

His questions perplex her. She is silent.

"You do not appreciate your beautiful country," he continues, "from living in it always. Wait till you have tasted the deadly dust of the town before you curl your lip at a blue bird's-eye, or pass judgment on the unbroken quiet of sinless Copthorne. Since I came here for rest and holiday leisure I seem to have grasped the whole history and charm of the place. It contains endless interest in its Godlike simplicity to the recluse or the reader. Look what fields for the naturalist or botanist! Think, too, of an artist here for the first time—what sketches to be made at sunrise and sunset! You may call your little world dull, monotonous, uneventful, since reared in the green landscape with farmlands and woods around you are bound through custom to neglect the pleasures of imagination, and see it only without observing."

"I am glad you are so enthusiastic over Copthorne," replies Eleanor, catching at the meadow-sweet, and crumbling it between her fingers. "I suppose you have been living a very different life in London?"

"It is a great change," he replies, "from the bustle of fashion to the unbroken quiet. But I must own I didn't enjoy so completely all the beauty of this glad country scene till *you* came, Eleanor, happy in the rich possession of youth and lightheartedness."

Now his conversation grows interesting, the perfect smile with which she is naturally blessed creeps through her lips to her eyes, illuminating her whole countenance. In the distance the regular click of a reaping machine falls on the breeze.

"You must see more of our life," she says impetuously. "Next week all our labourers will be reaping, and our barns are ready for the first loads of harvest. Do not go till it is gathered in!"

"Shall I promise? Would it give you pleasure?"

"Yes."

A pause, during which an old horse puts his nose over the gate of an adjacent field, regarding Philip and Eleanor complacently.

"Then it's a bargain! If *you* will be pleased, I will stay; but not unless."

A little gasp escapes her lips.

"Can you doubt it, Philip?" she murmurs.

He is satisfied by the earnest tone, gratified by her humility and undisguised devotion.

"Would you like to see my home?" she asks, for their steps are nearing the quaint farmhouse.

"Indeed, I should."

She takes him from the sloping cornfield, topped by a windmill, to where the path joins a kitchen garden—a perfect holiday ground for bees. The vegetables seem in perfect harmony with yellow marigolds and calceolaria. The house is divided from the road by palings richly covered by virginia creepers, and as they approach Philip pauses to lean on the wicker gate and view the peaceful homestead silently. The drone of bees and busy presence of insect toil is soothing and melodious. He takes Eleanor's hand and kisses it in the full glare of the mid-day sun under the heavily laden fruit trees. Then they pass by the brilliant flower-beds to the rustic porch, through which is visible the Grebbys' twelve o'clock repast spread on a clean white linen cloth, a vase of wild flowers for simple decoration. There are bright coloured texts on the walls, and an old Family Bible under a glass case.

"My mother will be back from the market directly," says Eleanor; "would you do us the honour of stopping to dinner?"

The tone becomes a supplication, mingled with smiles.

"You are too kind," declares Philip, touched by the unostentatious hospitality of his newly found friend. "I shall be most delighted."

"Come and let us watch for the return of Black Bess," she cries, leading the way out into the garden again. Philip thinks he has never spent a more delightful morning.

To have missed it would have been to lose one of the sweetest episodes of his life. The intense restfulness of Copthorne Farm, the fragrance of the air, the softness of the carpet beneath his feet, the cattle browsing in verdant pastures, and the murmur of those winged and drowsy honey-laden workers from the meadows, make a picture which will never pass from his mind. For the moment, while basking in the harvest sun, a scene which must some day be only a faded pleasure left to recollection, is Paradise!

Then the Grebbys' return from their marketing, to welcome the stranger whom Eleanor proudly introduces. Hospitality is a creed with them, and renewing their daughter's invitation, they place the choicest their home affords before the unexpected guest. Thus it is that Philip Roche finds himself in Eleanor's family circle, discussing the crops and weather with her father, a rubicund, hale old man, whose life is centred in bucolic pursuits.

* * * * * * *

The harvest is over, the wheat and barley are garnered, but still Philip lingers, chained by that mysterious agent the world calls—Love!

He sees the embodiment of all he most admires in Eleanor, the sweet domesticated country maiden, pure as the health-laden breezes sighing through the trees. His love ennobles his being, he is surprised at this inexplicable and unfathomable passion.

"Eleanor," he says, "I am going away—I want to take you with me. Will you be my wife?"

It is more a command than a question. He cannot do without her. She *must* consent.

The girl's breath comes and goes swiftly; for a moment he fears she will faint.

The future dances before her swimming brain, the alluring prospect of money, position, pleasure, whisper like fiends in Eleanor's ears. Love is forgotten; she only remembers the vague unsatisfied ambitions of her young dreams. She lets him kiss her lips again and again, she is clasped in his arms, yet feels them not; her mind fixed on the dazzling picture of "what is to be!"

"Your answer, Eleanor, darling — love!" he gasps, watching the glorious colour mount to her face, the marvellous radiance fill her eyes.

"Yes, Philip, your wife always!" Her head is on his shoulder, he has gathered her hands about his neck. The brief midday hours fly as she yields to the tender wooing.

"Soon," he whispers, "autumn's fingers of decay will creep over Copthorne, while leaves must fall damp and dead in the country lanes. Marry me, Eleanor, now the summer is here."

She starts back, a deadly fear knocking at her heart. She laughs, apparently frivolous and light-hearted.

"Yes, in the summer, sometime next year."

"Next year!" his face falling. "But when? Next year has 365 long days!"

She smiles entrancingly, shrugging her shoulders.

"Oh! well—when the birds begin to sing."

"No," he cries, drawing her to him, "before they are silent, Eleanor, before the light of summer goes out of the heavens, and the blue sky fades to grey!"

Her eyes droop, her cheek is pale.

(To be continued.)

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"But, Boris, I know it. Thou canst not be always like this, and thou wilt return to thine own people. The white Russian girls are very beautiful, and thou art beautiful, Boris."

"Nay, Hasna, thou art wrong. The daughters of my land are indeed lovely; they are flaxen-haired, and like the sun shining full on the gold of Tillah-Karri; but thou art all to me, and their loveliness is as the autumn moon on the wonderful glories of the Gur Emir."

"Oh, Boris, thy words are sweeter than honey, but I am a woman and I fear."

"Fear not, my pearl of price. Hast thou not my word? Hast thou not all my love, all my heart? Let us cease this foolish talk, Hasna. See the evening lightning how it plays there over the black masses of the Shir-Dar. Listen to Abdoul's zither, and his song of the glories of Timour. Let us come into the garden, Hasna, and we will visit thy rose-trees and cull the sweetest blossoms to perfume thy couch to-night."

Boris Alekhin meant it all. He was indeed enchanted with the Uzbek girl, and felt the hours days when he was not listening to the accents of her fervid speech, and gazing on her lustrous beauty. He had poured out before her the wealth of his passionate nature. Cards and wine, dinners, and fine society were all relinquished that he might devote his life to the ineffable charm of this Eastern girl's presence.

His wealth and his voluptuous tastes were employed in fitting out the exquisite little bungalow outside the walls, and every luxury that he thought might fascinate her—carpets, flowers, zithers, perfumes, rare brocades from India and China. And yet Hasna would have cast all this behind her, and lived in a wretched hovel could she thereby strengthen in ever so slight a degree the love of her Russian lord.

But it came about that Alekhin's regiment, after three years' idleness in Samarkand, was ordered up the Oxus to Kirki. This was a terrible blow to Hasna, for strict orders had been given that the regiment was to be unimpeded by the company of women and children.

Alekhin felt it very keenly as well, but he was busy with the bustle of departure, and his thoughts were of military honours to be won on active service. Plunging through the deep sands of the Turkestan desert, along the desolate banks of the mighty river, overhead a pitiless sky of brass, the strong men falling out and dying by the wayside, a hot cicala from the south blowing clouds of fine sand in their faces—the regiment struggled on to Kerki.

There they had frontiers to delimit, and Afghans and wild Vakhan hillsmen to watch, and reservoirs and dams to build, and barracks to repair. Cholera was speeding along towards them from Meshad, and the black plague from Balkh, and the doctors discovered guinea worm in the water, and an unknown disease that was killing the camels and horses by inches.

It was all miserable, and the officers drank hard, and gambled hard, and two or three of the sillier and more sentimental of them dispatched themselves, after sending home long letters to their mothers, and packages containing their watches and silver cigarette-cases to their sisters.

Alekhin did nothing so foolish; he worked hard; but he often thought longingly of the shady garden inside the high walls, and of his bright Hasna in the bijou bungalow, whose speech was so musical, whose dark eyes were so wonderfully mysterious, and who loved him so. They never wrote to one another. Hasna could not write, and Boris would not put that on paper which might go through so many hands, and be seen by so many eyes before it reached her.

Alekhin's regiment sweltered fourteen months in Kerki, and then the longed for order came—they were to return to Samarkand, draggled, scorched, fever-stricken. They arrived in their old quarters. Three days was granted for an orgy, and I trust my gentle readers have no notion of how unspeakable a Russian orgy is. Alekhin had been counting the hours to the delicious meeting with Hasna, and not a moment did he lose in hastening to the well-known wicket. He gave the well-known signal, and impatiently repeated it, then incontinently kicked in the door, and was met by Abdoul, gasping, staring, and trembling. Abdoul's lips strove to say something, but they emitted no sound. He weakly sought to bar Alekhin's way.

"Out of my road, idiot! Why don't you speak? What are you mumbling about? Where's your mistress?"

"Oh, lord and master, don't go there! I intreat you in Allah's name! I will speak."

But Alekhin sprang forward. He rushed to the house and entered the well-known room. From the glare of noon-day light into the shade of the room his eyes were blinded for a moment, and he saw nothing; but he heard a sob, a stifled groan, and going forward a step he stumbled on a female figure, bowed, thickly veiled, sitting on the floor, and her right hand wrapped in a black cloth. He drew back a few steps.

"Hasna, my Hasna, what is this? Is this thy welcome of me? What did Abdoul mean?"

"Come not nearer, Boris; for the love of Allah not nearer. Nay, don't touch me!" And she shrank from him. "Canst thou not guess? Why do I not show thee my face? Why is my hand thus? Why, after all these weary moons, do I not rise and embrace thee, my lord and my king? Oh, leave me! I am unclean—unclean!"

Alekhin bent down, stupefied, and would have removed the veil; but at his touch, the girl uttered a piercing shriek, and fell prone upon the floor. Horrified, dizzy, fearing he knew not what, he turned round. Abdoul, with bent head, was standing beside him. "Master," he whispered, "Hasna is a leper! Come away!"

Alekhin never knew how he reached his club. It was to his club he went. But he joined in the dreadful orgy of his comrades, and forgot *that*. He sang the vilest

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songs, drank the strongest *vodka*, played wildly, made night hideous, sullied his soul; and then he quietly went home to quarters, pale, silent, ashamed.

Now, Alekhin had undoubtedly distinguished himself on the frontier. He had captured some important secret dispatches that were on their way between the potentates in Cabul and Bokhara. He had also invented a weir that turned out of great service in the construction of a dam, and his superior officer refused—*mirabile dictu*—to take the credit of all this, and recommended him for promotion.

And as just then they wanted a clever young man in the Ministry of War, a young man who knew all about Turkestan, it came about that Alekhin had hardly recovered from his hurricane of debauch when he was invited to proceed to St. Petersburg, to fill one of the posts most eagerly sought after by brilliant young officers with a career.

The appointment flattered him; the kind things said by the Colonel, the congratulations of his comrades soothed him. There was only one shadow, and that black, brooding, terrible. But as the days wore on, and his ambition rose, and he nourished a feeling of satisfaction with himself, he thought less of that awful veiled figure in the house in the garden.

He sent for Abdoul, and with coolness and method he explained to the old man that he was leaving for St. Petersburg, and that he wished to make handsome provision for him and his charge. The old Mussulman listened to all the arrangements, bowed a profound salaam, and vanished.

Next day Alekhin was sent away with princely honours, and his hopes rose higher and higher and took wings to themselves. The joy of travelling home filled him, and he thought of mother and sisters and of his house on the Nevsky Prospect; and once or twice, in the luxurious comfort of his first-class compartment, of girls he knew as a lad. "Wonder where they all are. Wonder if Lolya is married yet." But this reflection stung him, and he thought of Hasna. "Poor Hasna!" he sighed.

In St. Petersburg it was the best society he met. The pleasantest and nicest girls made love to the brilliant young officer from Central Asia. And once there was a delightful picnic to the Bezborodka gardens all in his honour, and his old playmate Lolya was there, still unmarried. And he and Lolya talked of old times, and wandered under the shady trees, and he told her all about Samarkand and Kerki—no, no, not everything, but enough for Lolya. Weeks went on, and at last there was a brilliant marriage in St. Isaac's, and Alekhin and Lolya went to Vienna, and after a month returned to their beautiful villa supremely happy.

But in that odorous garden outside the walls of Samarkand, Hasna was fretting out her soul, and the terrible disease was making rapid inroads. Night and day she worried Abdoul for news of Alekhin, and was told that he had gone to St. Petersburg, but would soon return. And when she knew that death was nearing, and that perhaps Boris would not be back in time, an unquenchable desire to see him again possessed her, and she gave the old man no rest until he consented to take her there where *he* tarried so long.

So when the time came for the merchants of Tabriz and Bokhara to set out on the road to the great fair at Nijni Novgorod, Abdoul, dressed as one of them, and with a thickly-veiled figure at his side, whom he declared was his wife, took the train across the desert to the Caspian, and the steamboat over the Caspian to Astrakhan, and another steamboat up to Volga to Novgorod, and the train again to St. Petersburg.

And veiled Hasna crouched on the decks of the steamers after the manner of Eastern women travelling, and the sailors and passengers made fun of her and of Abdoul; but they never saw her face. Had they seen that there would have been no more laughter. In St. Petersburg they took refuge in a low, waterside lodging-house, and Abdoul soon heard all about Alekhin, all about Lolya and the lovely villa, and the brilliant company they were entertaining on their return from their honeymoon. But he only told Hasna that he had discovered where Alekhin lived, and that he would take her there that evening, when she would see him.

When it grew dark Abdoul and Hasna stole from their wretched lodging and wandered out to the fashionable suburb. It was a lovely night, and the fresh, cool scent of northern flowers was in the air, and blackbirds sang in the trees. It was midsummer, casements were flung open, and Hasna saw men and beautiful women in luxurious apartments, and heard music and laughter and the merry voices of children. Opposite a charming villa Abdoul stopped. It was a few yards back from the road, and jasmine and roses covered it. The rooms were all lighted up, and the long French windows were open. A crowd of ladies and gentlemen filled the spacious apartments; the band was playing a waltz, and every one was dancing.

"There he is," whispered Hasna. "Oh, how beautiful he is! Oh, my Boris, my Boris!"

"Come away, Hasna; thou hast seen him."

"Nay, a moment longer. Who is that in his arms? Ah, how lovely she is! She loves him. See her eyes. Who is she?"

"His wife."

The frail girl let her head droop down on the low stone wall that surrounded Alekhin's grounds, but she said nothing. Her veil slipped to one side, and a passer-by got a glimpse of the stricken silver-grey face, and will never forget it.

Abdoul led Hasna away, and they returned to their people.

Capel Chernilo.

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A Mirage of Midnight.

IT was nearly midnight; the ironing was done, and the clothes lay heaped on the table in snowy piles still hot from the iron. Ann Quinn drew a chair up to the little kitchen window that overlooked the river, and sat down with a sigh of pain, for her back ached. She rested her chin in her hand, and stared through the faint tracery of familiar objects on the glass to the water beyond, lying dark and glossy under the stars.

"I wonder if Miss Niles wants that minced meat for breakfast?" thought Ann Quinn, for she was both a cook and a laundress. "Perhaps I'd better fry them cold potatoes left from dinner, too," she continued, her eyes resting on a far-away cluster of electric lights that trembled like a diamond pendant.

Presently, as she sat there, the red rim of the moon pushed itself up behind some trees on the opposite shore. Ann Quinn watched it rising with a meditative look. "It's terrible red; them little branches looks like they were drawn on it with a pen. I wonder what that black thing in the water is?" she broke off, as a feeler of moonlight slipped across the river to where something black and long bobbed stiffly in the current.

She shaded her eyes from the lamp, and pressed her face close to the glass. "Looks like a man," she muttered. As she spoke, the thing wheeled about and began drifting in towards the stone breakwater beneath the window. Slowly it drew near, the little moon-sparks dancing in its wake. It floated into the shadow, and she strained her eyes in vain to follow it.

"Think I'll go to bed," she said, giving one more look into the darkness. She did not go though, for suddenly she saw a lean hand thrust over the breakwater, then another, and the next moment the figure of a man crawled out on to the stone below her.

Ann Quinn started back, her heart pumping like a steam-dredger, for she heard the thick splash of wet feet coming up the steps, and she saw a face pressed against the window that she had just quitted—a drawn face, yellow—pale as the handkerchief knotted about its throat.

"Let me in, Ann Quinn," said the lips, though she heard no voice. "Let me in."

She stood staring, her broad cheeks whiter than the plates on the dresser behind her, but she did not move. The man waited a moment, then he pushed the latch and swung himself into the room.

The lamp blinked and guttered in the draught, and a door slammed. Ann Quinn quivered from head to foot. The man stood staring at her with famished eyes.

"A lifetime, a whole lifetime," he whispered at last, and his voice sounded cold and empty as the echo in a vault.

"Go away," cried Ann Quinn, "and take your wet hand off my ironing."

The man moved, and stared at the piles of clothes on the table.

"Did you do that?" he asked in a low voice, "and are you tired?"

"Yes, I did, an' I am tired," she replied, stealing her way stealthily towards the door.

As she moved her terror lent a new, cat-like grace to her awkward body; she looked almost like another woman in the swaying light—a woman with narrow, wicked eyes and lithe motions. The man stepped quickly before the door and stood there, his clothes flooding the black river water on her clean floor.

"And all this time you have worked, while I have had more, a thousand times more, than I could use; and we have lived near each other, here in the same town, and never knew it!" He covered his face with his hands and groaned. Then he moved towards her, his arms outstretched: "My love, my lost love! give me one kiss, my first since the other grave closed over us!"

Ann Quinn gulped, and her anger was aroused. "If you touch me I'll kill you," she said hoarsely, catching a knife up from the shelf behind her. The man seemed not to hear her; he grasped her in his arms, and crushed his mouth on hers, and his lips were wet and cold.

Ann Quinn leapt away from him and buried the great knife in his heart. He looked into her terrified eyes, and a shadow fell on his face.

"See," he said mournfully, "you have stabbed me again, but this time it is too late."

She looked, and there was no blood gushing from the great slash, only the drip, drip, of the thick water. Then she covered her face and prayed, for she saw that the man was dead.

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There was a long silence, broken by the chime of a clock in the house behind them. The man shivered. "An hour more, dear God, only an hour more!" he pleaded, and he wrung his hands, crying hurriedly: "How can I say it all! how can I make her understand!" He seized Ann Quinn's arm and shook her fiercely.

"Remember, woman! Try to remember! Have I forgotten? Have I not lived alone—waiting—and you never came?"

She brushed her rough hand over her eyes; something stirred in her torpid brain. As the summer lightning, threading the sky, will show a sudden pearly perspective of unseen cloud-mass, then flash out, leaving the same blind night it found, so the soul of Ann Quinn opened for an instant, beyond her wretched work-ridden world, only to close again as quickly. The man caught her look, and asked, his voice tense and quivering:

"Those faded lilies-of-the-valley, there in that cup, why did you keep them only from the flowers you threw away this morning?"

"They—they—smelled good," answered the woman, troubled, bewildered.

"Only that?"

"Yes, only that."

"Have you never dreamed of some one you loved, some one apart from this miserable squalor I find you in?"

The blood flooded into her sallow face.

"What business is that of yours? Go away, I say!" she added weakly, giving him a push, and catching at the table to save herself from falling.

"Tell me," he pleaded, "have you never missed me, who was more to you those few short years ago than life?"

Ann Quinn looked into his eyes and laughed. There was no mirth in that laugh, though, and he shielded himself as though she had struck at him. Then he spoke again.

"Listen," he said. "To-night in a far land my soul will be born anew—until then the veil is lifted. But we will cheat God and Love and Law! You and I—together. Soon my eyes will be blinded and I shall not know you, except by this—take it and keep it always over your heart, and though you be old and bent, and though you be a little child, still I shall know you."

He thrust his hand into his breast and drew out a leather case. He opened it and pushed something towards her. She looked; it was a faded spray of lily-of-the-valley. Then he reached into his pocket and threw a canvas bag down on the table. "Take these," he said; "there is enough here to keep you from this drudgery," he pointed to the ironing; "and now I must be gone—the river calls me."

They stood looking at each other in silence. The light swam before Ann Quinn's eyes, and everything blurred but that white face staring into hers; nearer it came, ever nearer, and she felt her muscles quiver in resistance, then grow lax; there was a pause, a gasping breath, and she had thrown herself into his arms. The cold ooze from his wet hair trailed on her neck; closer and closer they swayed together, locked in each other's arms; then, with a strange thin cry, like the wail of a new-born child, the man tore himself away, and leapt from the window into the night beyond. There was a heavy splash, and silence.

The wind had blown out the lamp. Ann Quinn groped her way to the table, dazed and stupid. She struck a match; it sputtered and went out. Then she crawled away into a corner, her wide eyes fixed on the open window. The moon swam high, and the river ran molten silver beneath it. The little stars set, and the grey scroll of morning unrolled across the night. Still she sat there, her eyes fixed on the empty window-space.

Suddenly she stood up, and she felt old, and dizzy, and lame. She reached out and picked up the canvas bag the man had given her. She shook it, and there rolled out on the table a great handful of unset rubies. Ann Quinn stood staring at them until the first sunbeam came sifting through the darkness, lighting them into a thousand crimson sparkles.

There was a rap at the door, and she thrust the jewels from sight. It was only the milkman, and he looked at the woman's face in disappointment. "So you've heard the news already?" he asked.

"What news?"

"Why, didn't you know they've found the body of Ellis Price, the millionaire, drowned not a hundred yards from this very spot."

"No," said Ann Quinn.

"Yes, and they think he must have been murdered. He left home to go to the bank with some rubies he had for his niece's wedding, and they weren't on the body anywhere."

"Murdered—murdered? What would they do if they found someone with them rubies?" Ann Quinn asked thickly.

"Why, hang him high as he'd swing," answered the milkman.

Ten minutes later Ann Quinn stole down to the river-side. She reached over and dropped a handful of stones into the water—a handful of stones that shone like blood-drops. Down they sank into the grey river slime. But on the ripples above them hung something too light to sink, for it was only a dried stem of lilies-of-the-valley.

Ann Quinn watched it drift out of sight, then she turned back to the house to get breakfast.

Julie Kenly.

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I.

The Biddlestone Distillery was an old-established concern, founded by Herbert Carson's grandfather, who made a fortune, which his son spent. Dying, John Carson bequeathed the business, all he had to leave, to Herbert, who very soon discovered that it was necessary to take stock and place the books in the hands of a firm of accountants. He received their report, and at once called on his cousin, Kate Hemming, to whom he was engaged.

"I've got it," he said, as soon as the couple were alone. "The business is fifteen thousand to the bad. Drake and Smith tell me I must find capital to clear off the liabilities, or wind up—that is, break, smash, come to grief. They suggest a partner, but can't conscientiously recommend the concern to any client of theirs. A nice outlook, isn't it?"

Kate sighed. She was a very pretty girl, a brunette of the dashing type, and being particularly fond of "Handsome Bertie," as young Carson was popularly called, her sympathy could be counted upon.

"It is a very miserable one," she said mournfully. "Do you think you could induce anyone to invest?"

"I'm afraid it's impossible," he answered. "You see I've been going the pace almost as fast as the governor did. It's no use my saying I didn't know the distillery was in Queer Street, and promising to amend—selling my hunters and that sort of thing. It's true enough; but who would believe it?"

"A stranger might."

"A stranger with fifteen thousand to invest would employ a sharp solicitor to make inquiries. No. I've looked at it all round. It's a hopeless case."

"I am afraid it is," said Kate, after a thoughtful pause, "unless you can marry money quickly. If I had fifteen thousand, or fifteen hundred, you should have it. As I haven't, you'll have to marry money, Bertie." And she sighed again, very deeply.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "What about you?"

"Oh, I shouldn't die of a broken heart," she answered, with a dismal little laugh. "I'm very fond of you, Bertie, but I couldn't do that if I wanted to. It's plain we can't marry, so you had better try somewhere else before the crash comes."

He looked at her suspiciously. Having a very good opinion of himself, her apparently careless surrender of her own claims was not soothing to his *amour propre*.

"You are heartless!" he exclaimed rather angrily. "I don't understand you at all. What are you driving at?"

"I am not heartless," she answered, and her quivering eyelids and lips proved the assertion. "I should be glad to marry you to-morrow if either of us had any prospects. But if I did so under the present circumstances I should ruin you, and I won't do that if you fall on your knees. This is what I am driving at: Clara Lorimer has loved you in secret ever since she was a

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school-girl with confidants by the half-dozen. She has heaps of money. Go and try your luck."

It was news—amazing news. Herbert Carson immediately saw the way out of his difficulties. Miss Lorimer and he were very old friends. Recollections of tender glances and sighs, and words whose meaning was scarcely hidden, flashed to mind. Remembering, he knew that Kate was not deceiving him; but he loved his cousin as well as it was possible for such a man to love anyone, and although to save himself he would have sacrificed much, it was unnecessary to lose her good opinion by adopting her suggestion too eagerly.

"I can't do that," he rejoined in a half-hearted manner. "What would you think of me?"

"I," she answered with another mirthless laugh. "Oh, I should think you were a wiser man than your father."

John Carson had married for his second wife a penniless beauty whose extravagance had helped to wreck the family ship.

"But your own feelings?" Herbert went on.

"Oh, I should soon get over it. Don't think of me."

"I can't do it?" he repeated.

"Then," she rejoined, "you force me to set you free. I dare not marry you, Bertie. I should ruin a poor man in a month. Here is your ring." She took the jewelled circlet from her finger, and placed it in his hand. "Think what you like of me, but go and ask Clara Lorimer to marry you, and when you have got her and her money treat her well. It would break my heart to see you down at heel, hard up, living on your friends, Bertie, and I powerless to assist you. This is the only way I can help you. Now go—there's a good fellow."

He protested vehemently. Nevertheless, he went, conscious that he had played the martyr very well.

As soon as the door had closed behind him, Kate sat down and cried for ten minutes. Then she wiped away her tears with a dainty, lace-bordered handkerchief, effaced their traces with some mysterious preparation, and put her love-disappointment resolutely aside.

II.

Herbert Carson found Miss Lorimer at home, a plain-featured, rather dowdy girl of twenty-eight, no more like his brilliant cousin than a brown moth is like a "peacock" butterfly. But drowning men do not examine the lifebuoy thrown to their aid with a nice eye. Certainly he had no scruples strong enough to induce hesitation. More or less a flirt since his boyhood, Kate's beauty and sprightliness had kept him pretty constant at heart, but words meant little, and there were few girls of any standing in Biddlestone with whom "Handsome Bertie" had not, at one time or another, bandied soft nothings. With Clara Lorimer he was scarcely on less familiar terms than with Kate, his late *fiancée*, herself.

"Kate has thrown me over, Clara," he suddenly exclaimed, after a few commonplaces.

Surprised, Miss Lorimer rose from her chair, then sat down and tried to look regretful, in which she did not quite succeed. Herbert Carson, who was watching her narrowly, saw that he had only to speak.

"Yes," he went on, "it's a question of money. The governor has died poor, and the business is in a queer way. I shall have as much as I can do to keep going. I shall have to leave Oakvale, sell my horses, and climb down pretty considerably. I told Kate just how matters stood. You know the result."

He paused for a reply, which was not forthcoming immediately. Miss Lorimer was never quick at putting her thoughts into words.

"I am very sorry that you are in difficulties," she said at length, not, however, in a sorrowful tone. "I shouldn't grieve about Kate, though, if I were you. You ought to be glad that she has shown herself in her true colours. I should forget her and look for someone more worthy—more faithful," she added as an after reflection.

"I'm not going to grieve about her," he rejoined. "Judging by my feelings, I don't think I could have cared for her in the right way. But as for looking for someone else, how can a poor fellow on the verge of bankruptcy do that? What would you answer, for instance, if I came to you and said: 'Clara, I've been fond of you for years, but didn't know my own mind. I'm poor now, and in need of financial assistance. Will you marry me and help me?' That is the plain English of it," he went on, "and a nice cad I should feel if I did it."

Miss Lorimer blushed deeply. But it did not seem to strike her that Herbert Carson's artful speech was in fact a direct proposal.

"I shouldn't think it was caddish," she answered, hesitated a moment, then went on: "I know someone who would be only too glad to help you."

He knew perfectly well to whom she was alluding, but he was too cunning to show his cards at once.

"I wish I did," he rejoined, passing a white hand over his forehead. "I should be very grateful. Is it anyone I'm acquainted with? Is it a lady?"

"Yes; and you know her very well."

He sighed. And Miss Lorimer sighed in sympathy.

"That's just the difficulty," he went on. "A man can't accept assistance from a lady, unless he happens to love her, and she is willing to marry him. Ah! if it were only you, Clara, and you would marry me—but there's no such luck likely to come my way." Pausing, he allowed his hand to fall over and conceal his eyes.

Miss Lorimer blushed again, more deeply still.

"It is me!" she cried impulsively. "It isn't wrong to say so, is it?"

When, half an hour afterwards, Herbert Carson departed from Miss Lorimer's residence, he was once more an engaged man. And his *fiancée* was worth £25,000. He did not feel particularly jubilant about it. Clara was not Kate by a long shot. But he was satisfied that he had done a big day's work.

III.

The sudden transfer of "Handsome Bertie's" affections caused considerable talk in Biddlestone. As his financial straits forbade delay, the wedding was arranged to take place almost immediately. There was no difficulty with the creditors, however, after they were informed that the distillery would at once be put on a sound footing. Miss Lorimer had agreed to defray all existing liabilities. Consequently, Herbert Carson's mind was easy on that score; but he was not happy. Indeed, for the greater part of a day he was more than half inclined to cry off. It was after a visit from Dr. Bayntun, an old friend of his father's, who had been the Lorimer's medical attendant before Clara was born.

"So you are going to marry money, Bertie," he said. "I would congratulate you if I dared."

"What's the row?" was the natural, if slangy question.

"No row, my boy, but just a word of warning," rejoined the old doctor, who, as he had retired from

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Lying on the floor beside a broken decanter.

practice, could afford to be more out-spoken than the majority of medical men consider it expedient to be. "Drinking was never your father's failing," he went on, "nor is it yours. But I know your wine-cellar is pretty well stocked."

"Yes, it is," said Carson, wondering what was coming next.

"Well, keep it locked, and carry the key in your pocket—when you have taken your wife home."

Carson stared in amazement at the Doctor. "Good Heavens!" he cried. "Do you mean to say that Miss Lorimer drinks?"

But Dr. Bayntun had not quite forgotten the circumspection essential to success in his calling. He smiled blandly, but enigmatically.

"I have warned you. Her mother and her grandmother died of too much brandy, though it didn't appear in the death certificates. It's in the blood. Don't let it break out."

Having done what he considered to be his duty to his old friend's son, Dr. Bayntun went his way. But it would have required a much stronger warning to defer that hasty marriage, not to mention breaking it off altogether.

At the hour fixed the ceremony took place.

Among the numerous presents was a handsome one from Kate, a gold-mounted inkstand in the shape of an owl, doubtless typical of her old lover's wise and prudent conduct.

Mrs. Carson not only paid all the creditors, she provided capital to work the distillery with profit. Gratitude would have induced some men to simulate affection, even though they did not feel it; but Herbert Carson was not one of them. He was deeply aggrieved because, six months after his own marriage, Kate took it into her head to wed Mr. Lyons, a wealthy brewer, forty years her senior.

Then, when it was too late, he speedily discovered that Dr. Bayntun's warning was well grounded. Clara exhibited such a marked fondness for stimulants, that various kind friends declared she must have had the distillery in mind when she engaged herself to Herbert Carson. He locked up the wine cellar, as advised, and also put the cellarettes under lock and key, but whenever they quarrelled, which was not seldom, she contrived to obtain spirituous consolation.

One day, about eight months after their marriage, he found her intoxicated. In his rage he threw prudence overboard—declared that he did not care a straw for her and never had done; he had married her for her money, and the sooner she drank herself to death the better he would be pleased; the natural result of such treatment being that she gave way entirely to her inherited craving. What little good looks she had ever possessed speedily disappeared. Before she had been a wife a year she had become a slattern and a shrew. One after another her friends ceased to call. Her degradation was known to every soul in Biddlestone.

Her husband made no attempt to reclaim her. He was seldom at home. In horse-racing and other forms of gambling, Stock Exchange speculation, and the like, he sought and found consolation—losing heavily as a matter of course. His capital melted away. Debts accumulated. Two years after his marriage his financial position was almost as bad as when Kate suggested that means of escape.

At this juncture Mr. Lyons died after a brief illness, leaving the brewery and the bulk of his wealth to his widow. Carson's dealings with the deceased brewer had been very large, and he owed the estate a considerable sum of money. The executors pressed for payment. Unable to liquidate the debt, he wrote to his old flame, asking for time. Since her marriage he had scarcely seen her. By return of post he received an invitation to call. He went, of course.

The two years which had elapsed since their engagement was broken off had in no way dimmed Kate's beauty. If anything, she was more handsome. Widow's weeds suited her style. She handed Carson his account—receipted.

"I owe it to you," she said. "My conscience has reproached me terribly for sending you to Clara. But I didn't know she drank until Dr. Bayntun told me. How should I? Poor fellow! I can see how wretched you are, and I pity you. But I have often, since my marriage, pitied myself as well. What a coward I was! If I could live my life over again, Bertie, I would act differently. Why wasn't I brave enough to marry you and bear poverty with you? It was my plain duty, and I failed. But I have regretted it, Bertie; I regret it every day of my life. Why can't we have our chances twice?" There were tears in Kate's beautiful eyes; her words came with a sob.

Carson was deeply moved, but Kate little knew the awful thought which caused his agitation. He tore himself away, fearful lest he should betray his Satan-suggested desire.

"If I were free," he muttered, as he returned to his office at the distillery, "Kate would marry me. I should be the richest man in Biddlestone. If I were free! If I were free!" And then his thoughts took a more defined shape. "Be free? It's easy enough; the means lie ready to your hand."

Arrived at the distillery, he secretly filled a handbag with bottles of over-proof spirit. Then, having in-

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formed his head clerk that he must go to London that evening, he went home, carrying the bag. Watching for his opportunity, and finding it, he filled up the decanters in the cellarettes from the bottles he had brought from the distillery, and left them on the sideboard where his wife could not fail to see them. This done, he sought the wretched woman, and, deliberately picking a quarrel, abused her as never before. When even his ingenuity was exhausted, and he could find no more taunts to shower upon her, he struck her, and rushed away to catch the London express.

Early next morning a telegram from his head clerk arrived at his hotel.

"Your wife is dangerously ill. Can you return at once?"

Of course he could return, having no business to transact. When he reached Biddlestone his wife was dead. She had been found insensible in her room, lying on the floor beside a broken decanter—one of those which her husband had filled with over-proof spirit.

He insisted that an inquest should be held, notwithstanding that the murdered woman's medical attendant expressed his willingness to give a certificate. The jury found a verdict of death from "alcohol poisoning." No imputation rested upon the murderer. On the contrary the Coroner and the jurymen united in condoling with him. He had done everything he could to save the miserable woman he had been so unfortunate to marry. The testimony of the servants proved that wines and spirits had always been kept under lock and key, except on this unlucky occasion, when, having to leave hurriedly to catch a train, he had omitted to put the cellarettes where the deceased could not get at them.

Her relationship permitted Kate to call upon the widower.

Her relationship permitted Kate to call upon the widower before the funeral. She considered it her duty to do so, no suspicion that he had contributed even to Clara's death having entered her head. It is scarcely necessary to say that he did not so much as hint at his hopes. Indeed three months had passed before he ventured to do so.

"I shall be glad to marry you and try to make you happy," she answered. "I loved you when I sent you away, and I have never ceased to love you. But there must be no scandal. We must let a year go by before our engagement is announced. In the meantime we mustn't see much of each other."

He did not demur. The period of probation soon passed. Then the engagement was declared, and the marriage arranged to take place ten days before Christmas.

IV.

It was the eve of the wedding. Carson was working late at the distillery. There was a press of orders always at that season, and he wished to leave everything straight, so that he might enjoy his honeymoon free of business worries and communications.

All goods ordered were packed on the second floor, which was reached from the office and store-room by a steep flight of stairs, lit by an unprotected gas-jet near the bottom. The office-door opened into a kind of well, gained by two steps down, whence the stairs to the packing-room sprang.

Having occasion to visit the second floor, Carson followed a porter up the staircase. The man was carrying on his shoulder a six-gallon jar of brandy. He had nearly reached the top, his master being only a few steps behind, when the jar slipped and fell from his shoulder. It struck Carson, who reeled and fell with it. In the well at the foot of the stairs he lay insensible, with the fragments of the shattered jar, and the spirit, which, unable to run further, had formed a pool about him. But his insensibility could not have been of more than a moment's duration. In an instant the staircase was a roaring furnace. The gas had set the brandy alight. There was no escape. The clerks in the office heard the crash, but they were unable to open the door, for the wretched man's body lay against it. Unable to rise, he could only shriek and pray, while the brandy blazed around him.

His agonised cries brought the packing staff to the head of the stairs. They looked, but the sight was too horrible. The fire, which had caught the woodwork, beat them back. Shrieking louder than the doomed man below, they fled to save their own lives, for in that building, stored with inflammable spirit, a moment's delay might mean death. Carson was left to his awful fate. His cries soon ceased, but the brandy flamed until almost every vestige of the miserable man had been consumed.

The distillery was burned to the ground. A few calcined bones were all that was recovered of its late owner.

At the inquest which followed, the jury, with true, if unwitting prescience, declared that Herbert Carson died "by the Hand of God."

Kate's mourning was as rich and deep as her grief was sincere.

Ashmore Russan.

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THE WHITE HART.

I WAS born with the instincts of a true sportsman.

For a long time I was at a loss to know from what source had come my passion for guns and gunning. My father was anything but a connoisseur of deadly weapons, and my mother never knew the butt from the muzzle of a gun, and was equally afraid of each.

While I was a child, it amused my brothers to hear me discuss the merits of choke-bore shot guns and breechloading rifles; but when I grew to woman's estate this highly unfeminine taste displeased and even alarmed them. They were very proper young men, and did not relish the idea of a young lady sister who could take a snipe on the wing, or pierce the bull's-eye with a revolver at sixty paces. Dear boys, they feared, too, that such a propensity might seriously endanger my being settled in life.

They remonstrated, they scolded; they brought me the accounts of all the dreadful accidents that resulted from the use of firearms, and tried to extort from me a promise that I would never touch a gun again. I might have yielded had not an unfortunate circumstance occurred that made me deaf to all intreaties.

An uncle who had heard of my skill, and was queer and old-fashioned enough to admire it, sent me on my eighteenth birthday a handsome Winchester rifle which he had ordered to be made for me. From that day I ceased to struggle against fate. I felt that my life would never be complete until I had hunted the deer or tracked the grizzly in his mountain home.

The opportunity came. Some friends invited me to spend a few weeks at their home in the Sierra. They had a little house among the pines in one of the most romantic regions of the range.

A hunting party was formed for my especial entertainment, and the night before as a prelude to the morrow's excitement we listened around the fire to the wild stories of the mountaineers.

* * * * *

"Old Clubfoot," a grizzly who had been known in the region for fifteen or twenty years, was a favourite topic. No one had had the hardihood to attack him since he had pursued a hunter a long distance and killed him with a stroke of his gigantic paw. An enormous trap had once been set for him and he had caught his foot in it, but with wonderful intelligence he had gone to the nearest rock and beaten it off. He was seen occasionally in the passing years, and now and then he helped himself to a sheep or calf unmolested.

There was also a white doe among the neighbouring mountains which seemed to bear a charmed life, for many hunters had shot at it and always missed. A superstition had naturally grown up about it, and the mountaineers held that some great calamity would attend the person who killed the white deer.

These stories aroused my imagination so that I could scarcely wait for the dawn of day, and I lay awake long after the house was silent, but was the first one stirring in the morning.

An old hunter, whom we called Uncle John, was the leader of the party, and to his care I was assigned. He had always wished to see a woman shoot, he said, and I should have a grand chance to show what I could do.

"Don't kill the white deer," some one called after us.

"No, no," I laughed back; "we'll take the greatest care."

We rode in silence till we reached the crown of a little hill where there was an open, grassy spot. I was close beside Uncle John when I saw him gaze fixedly ahead for a moment. Then without turning his head he said in a whisper:

"Get down quick! Here's your chance! As fine a shot as ever I see."

I was down before he had fairly begun to speak, but trembling all over, and my teeth chattered in a most unaccountable way.

"Slip up behind that sugar pine an' blaze away," was the whispered order; and hugging my rifle I obeyed, all the time with that dreadful shaking. It was "buck ague," as I afterwards learnt, a nervous affection experienced by young hunters during their first shot at a deer, and even old hunters have suffered from it.

The beautiful creature, a two-year old buck, stood quietly feeding, outlined against the sky. I levelled my rifle, never noticing that I had not raised the hammer, and pulled with all my strength. It did not "go off." At last, discovering the reason, I righted the hammer with a click. The deer raised his lordly head, snuffed the air, and was gone in a series of magnificent leaps.

"How beautiful!" I cried, forgetting in the novelty of the sight my own stupidity, of which however I was not long to remain unmindful. The look of contempt that greeted me as I turned to Uncle John withered me.

"*You'll* never kill a deer! Never see such a chance since I was born; not ten yards off. Pooh!" And the irate old hunter rode off, leaving me to follow or go back as I chose.

I have been mortified several times in my recollection; have been "spelled down" as a child in school; have missed the target in archery tournaments, and have been snubbed by a prospective mother-in-law; but never do I remember that my pride was so lacerated as now. The sunshine suddenly lost its brightness, the fresh, fragrant stillness was no longer a delight, and desperate thoughts flashed through my brain of putting an end to my wretched existence.

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At last I determined that instead of returning home to brood over my sorrow I would strike off by myself into the woods and redeem my reputation by taking home at night some trophy of my skill.

The soothing sunshine and delicious air by degrees restored my equanimity, and hope was high in my bosom. I scanned all the ravines closely, and looked wisely on the ground for tracks of beasts. I rode long and far, and when the sun was high threw myself beside a little spring that bubbled from the rocks and ate my luncheon, allowing my horse to graze near me. On my right was a small patch of green herbage across which the tall pines cast a sombre shadow. I was too high for birds; they were below in the valleys, though now and then a vulture sailed majestically around some distant peak. The loneliness and silence of the place began to be oppressive.

Suddenly there was a rustle in the tall grass under the pines. Looking up I saw the head of a deer. I seized my rifle, and, levelling it, fired with a steady hand. A deafening report crashed through the stillness and there leapt into the air a white deer! I sprang to the place. In the bloodstained grass lay the noble animal struggling with death.

I felt a thrill of superstitious horror; something as an old Egyptian must have felt had he killed unwittingly the sacred ibis, or the Ancient Mariner when he slew the albatross. I tried to stanch the blood, but the murderous ball had done its work too well. Hardly knowing what I did I took the head of the dying creature in my lap. In the large soft eyes were reflected the rocks and the swaying pines. As the breath grew fainter the head turned with a convulsive movement and the fast glazing eyes looked into mine with a gaze so human in its intelligence that I was almost crazed with grief and terror. I hurried from the spot only to find that my horse, probably frightened by the rifle-shot, had disappeared. I was alone and miles from home.

I discovered, too, that I lacked one of the most necessary requisites of the true hunter—ability to find my way under all circumstances.

It was already afternoon. I started to go back on foot the way I had come as nearly as I could remember it. When I reached a point high enough to command a view I did not feel reassured, for the mountains looked all alike and range after range stretched away on every side silent and relentless as the tomb. There was not a living thing in sight but a buzzard circling about a far-off peak.

At last I set off in a direction where I thought I recognised familar rocks. The killing of the white hart weighed heavily upon my spirits and filled me with vague fears. The stories of the night before added to my uneasiness. There was the danger that I might meet a bear. I had my rifle and three dozen cartridges in my belt, but Uncle John had said: "Give grizzlies a wide berth."

What could I do if I met one?

The way grew more and more intricate. Now I had to climb over boulders, and now force my way through tangled undergrowth, from which I emerged into the shadow of pines so gloomy that twilight seemed suddenly to have fallen.

There was a crashing of bushes as of some heavy body pushing itself through. I tried to run, but the roughness of the ground made me stumble at every step.

The noise came nearer. I knew that it could be nothing but a bear, and every other anxiety was swallowed up in present terror. I remembered that grizzlies do not climb unless the tree is neither too large nor too small. Ten yards to the left stood a slender tree with trunk clear for fifteen feet.

I sprang towards it, and although I had never been able to climb a tree before I climbed now without a moment of hesitation and scrambled to a seat among the branches. I shook so violently that I had to hold on by main force to keep from falling. I had been there probably thirty seconds when there shuffled from the bushes with awkward but impressive gait a monstrous grizzly bear.

I had dropped my gun in the excitement, and even had I kept it I should not have dared to fire. As the great beast shambled along I saw that he was lame. It was old Clubfoot, the terror and autocrat of the mountains. He was heading directly for my tree. My blood curdled and my breath stopped. I have no distinct recollections of the next few seconds. He approached within ten feet of my hiding-place, rolling his heavy head from side to side as if aware of an unseen foe. Then he passed on and was lost among the trees.

I remained motionless for nearly an hour, fearing to descend. Then I crept noiselessly in the direction whence old Clubfoot had come. My rifle, which must have fallen against the prostrate trunk by which I found it, was broken off short at the breech, the bear having struck it with his paw in passing.

Imagine my surprise when I emerged from among the trees to find the same little grass plot where I had killed the deer. At first I could not believe it, but there was the spring with the rock by which I had sat, and the remains of my luncheon lay scattered on the ground. I was tired as well as weak and nervous after the fright the bear had given me. But it was becoming a question of life and death, and I was not willing to die. Carefully gathering the scraps of bread and meat that I had thrown away, I resolved to follow the nearest cañon down to its mouth, which I was sure would lead me out into the open country somewhere.

The sides were so steep that I had to let myself down by clinging to roots and overhanging branches. I plodded on doggedly. In the heart of the cañons unnumbered horrors lurked and the rocky walls rose on each side of me toweringly insurmountable. I began to wonder if I had better go back when I was startled to see open before me what seemed almost a bottomless pit. The declivity was probably not more than fifteen feet, but it looked very terrible to me. I could not leap that distance nor could I climb round the steep and slippery sides. A tall tree grew from the lower level, however, and by leaning far out I caught a branch and thus climbed down.

I felt certain that now I must be very near the valley floor. Behind me in the hollows of the cañon the shadows of evening were already lying. I had sprained my ankle in the descent—an injury that at any time would have disabled me, but now could not be allowed to impede my progress. I limped along, hoping and fully expecting to see at a turning not far off the valley before me, the green fields, and the dwellings of men.

How were my hopes mocked when I found instead a precipice fully sixty feet deep. With a cry of horror I drew back and wrung my hands in despair.

Had I been saved from the jaws of a savage beast only to die more terribly by starvation or to be dashed to pieces in a rocky chasm?

Nature had never seemed to me more pitiless.

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The stony walls had looked down to me in awful silence. The yawning precipice at my feet seemed waiting with a sickening expectancy.

Before this I had been afraid to speak aloud for fear of rousing some wild animal; but now I felt that I should be glad to hear or see anything with life even if it were a savage. I shouted myself hoarse, but only strange echoes answered me from the frowning woods.

The shadows grew deeper. I must do something—anything.

It occurred to me to make a rope of some of my clothing, and thus descend. It was the work of but a moment to take off my long stockings and tie them together, and then to add my scarf. All this made only four or five yards in length. I tore the skirt of my stout waterproof suit in strips, which I tied together, until I had what seemed enough. Then, fastening a stone to one end I crept to the edge and let the rope down to measure the distance. It still lacked a little. The deficiency was soon supplied from the sleeves of the jacket. The root of a pine afforded a convenient place for attaching the rope; and, having first tested every foot of it to make sure that it would bear my weight, I was ready to swing off.

Several times I looked over and my head grew dizzy. I decided to go backward to obviate that difficulty. Fearing my shoes would be an hindrance in my clinging to the rope, I pushed them over, together with my cartridge belt. Another instant of hesitation and heart-sinking and I was fairly off.

I reached the bottom sore and breathless, but safe. Another trial awaited me. In the gathering gloom I could not find my shoes, and the sharp stones cut my tender feet at every step. Moreover, I dreaded rattlesnakes, and listened with painful acuteness for the warning rattle. I did not hear anything, and soon lost that fear in my overpowering anxiety to reach some human habitation.

It grew dark so rapidly that I had to use my stick at every step, as a blind man does, to feel the way before me. Before I groped along many rods my guide gave me timely warning of a chasm. Feeling for a stone, I hurled it forward, and heard it strike far down below.

I could go no further—at least until daylight—so, drawing back a few feet, I sat down to wait. I was so weary that I fell immediately asleep. I was awakened by a rifle-shot, followed quickly by a second report, but they sounded a long way off.

I started up and tried to shout an answer, but my over-strained throat could make no noise except a hoarse croaking like a child with croup. I was sure the shots came from my friends searching for me.

In the pocket of my jacket were some matches that I had not before remembered. It was not a moment before I had scraped some dry leaves together and set fire to them. A number of cones had fallen from the pines above, and there was a mass of dry chaparral, so that I had no lack of fuel.

By the blaze I could see the nature of the place about me. I was standing on a platform much like the one I had descended. On one side was the sheer wall, on the other the precipice. I was hemmed in by prison walls.

I heaped on branches till the flames ran high and made a roaring sound. The whole cañon was illuminated, and the tall pines shook like spectres in the fantastic light.

A crackling noise at a little distance drew my attention; chaparral cones, the pines themselves were ablaze. I had set the cañon on fire. Dismay succeeded my short-lived gleam of hope. In front was the chasm, behind the fire. I was about two rods from the ledge, and the flames crept towards me. I moved forward.

This sudden and awful danger gave me a voice. I screamed wildly as the fire reached out long, adder-like tongues for me.

A voice above shouted to me.

"Quick, quick!" I cried, "or it's too late!"

The fire had driven me so near the edge that a step would have hurled me over. I felt the terrible calm that comes to one when hope is dead. I saw two snakes leap upward in the blaze and writhe about each other in agony.

"Catch this, and tie it under your arms," shouted a voice, and a rope fell at my feet.

I was saved; but never since have I cared for hunting. I was cured by the dying look of the white deer.

Richard Sibert.

An Idyll of the Slums.

Lummin Street is an unsavoury bye-way in the north of London. The people who exist in Lummin Street do unmentionable things and use untranslatable language. They are ugly and unclean, and there is no variety in their repulsiveness. They have not even grace enough to be picturesque in their squalor.

But romance is a hardy flower, ungrudging of its perfume. It grows oftenest near to toil-worn hands, and, when plucked, lives longest under greasy bodices; rarely dying, indeed, until the hearts on which it feeds, are cold. High above the weedy undergrowth of petty cares and sordid aims that clog the bosoms of the dwellers in the world's dark places it flourishes, tracing on the dull grey background of inconsequent lives golden schemes of colour, or healing with its balm of fragrance the scars that unkind memories have left; so that every heart is lighter for its burden.

Even the bruised heart of Mary-Mary was lighter; though the scarce unfolded bud of romance that made its home there in the days of her youth drooped often under the heavy sadness of her tears.

She was called "Mary-Mary" because her moral nature was akin to that of the heroine of a popular

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nursery rhyme. She was a heavy-jawed, dull-eyed girl with no graces of form or manner to recommend her to the notice of any man. Yet a man fell in love with her. She knew that he was in love with her because he passed her door so often and always said: "'Ullo, Mary-Mary" so shamefacedly.

He was a costermonger, young and prosperous. His name was Wall Masters. And there was that in his eyes which Mary-Mary could never see without thrilling and blushing. She knew that he was hers as well as she knew that she was his when he cared to claim her. But there was a great wall of diffidence between them.

One day Mary-Mary made a friend. The friend's name was Liz, and she was a cripple. She was a newcomer to the neighbourhood, and lived at the extreme top and back of the house adjoining that in which Mary-Mary lived. The two girls first met on the crazy "leads" abutting on the rear of the houses, under their windows. Thither they went every day to enjoy the smoky evening breezes. They would sit there and chat until it was dark.

Their friendship was a week old, when one night Mary-Mary took Liz into her confidence and told her all about Wall Masters. From motives that she could not have defined to herself, she suppressed his name. Liz listened eagerly.

"I'm so glad it's like that wi' you, too," she said.

Mary-Mary started. She was sitting in the shadow, against a great black stack of chimneys.

"I s'pose you think," said Liz, "thet a pore, crippled thing like me ain't no right to 'ave anyfink ter do wi' love?"

"No, Liz! I reckon you oughter be loved mor'n most gels, on 'count o' yer affliction, y' know," said Mary-Mary awkwardly.

"Ah!" said Liz wistfully. "But all the same you can't imagine a bloke carin' for me, can yer?"

"Yuss, I can. You've got sech a sweet face—so kind an' nice. I'm sure any feller might go a long way further and find a sight wus gel 'n you."

Liz smiled. "That's on'y wot yer say. But it's good o' yer to say it."

"Tell me abart 'im," said Mary-Mary.

"E's the nicest, str'ightest bloke in the world!"

"O' course."

"But 'e really is!"

"So's mine."

'Then there must be two on 'em, that's all."

'Wot's 'is name?"

"Wall Masters."

"W—what?"

"Wall Masters. Least, thet's wot 'e's called. 'Is real name's Walter."

"Walter!"

"Wot's your bloke's name? You never towld me."

"Never mind abart 'im. Tell me abart Wall fust. 'Is 'e—do 'e love yer much?"

Liz blinked her eyes and sniffed. "'E useter," she said. "But—but 'e's cooled off a bit lately. I arst 'im abart it a day or two ago, and 'e told me 'e's got 'is eye on another gel. I don't know who she is, but I'd like to limb 'er, I would. I towld 'im so, an' 'e seemed put out. 'P'r'aps she won't 'ave me,' 'e sez. 'I ain't arst 'er yet,' 'e sez. 'Wot'll yer do if she won't 'ave yer?' I sez. 'I'll marry you,' 'e sez."

"An' would yer 'ave 'im arter thet?"

"O' course I would! I'd do anyfink to get 'im. It's 'ard ter be made a makeshift of, but I don't care s'long as 'e don't gimme the chuck."

"I wouldn't put up with it," said Mary-Mary hoarsely.

"You're different," said Liz. "There's plenty o' chances fer you. An' p'r'aps yer ain't so gorn on yer bloke as I am on mine." She wiped her eyes. "It do seem 'ard," she whimpered. "I ain't got much ter make me 'appy, Gawd knows, an' nar it seems as if I'm ter lose 'im. I dunno wot I shall do. She's sure ter 'ave 'im. Nobody couldn't 'elp likin' Wall. I alw's knoo 'e was too good fer me."

She bowed her face on her hands and wept. Mary-Mary, with her fingers interlaced in her lap, sat motionless in the shadow of the stack. Presently Liz looked up.

"You wouldn't b'lieve 'ow I've cried abart it," she said. "Every night I lay athinking of 'im. I on'y some ter live 'ere so as ter be nearer 'im. But 'e's on'y been to see me once since I came. An' 'e useter come every day!"

Mary-Mary shifted restlessly on her seat.

"I shouldn't worry abart it if I was you," she said.

"I can't 'elp it. You don't know wot 'e is ter me. O' it do seem 'ard!"

Mary-Mary rose unsteadily and went and laid her hand on Liz's head.

"I'm goin' in nar," she said.

"Goin' in!"

"Yuss."

"Wot for?"

"I've got a bit of a 'eadache."

"But it's cooler out 'ere. It'll git wuss if you go indoors. An' yer ain't told me abart your bloke yet."

"I'll tell yer some other night, not nar."

She kissed Liz on the forehead and climbed into her room and pulled down the window. She dropped on her bed and lay looking at the dirty ceiling with wide eyes. Her hand was pressed hard on her bosom and she breathed heavily.

For more than an hour she lay there. Then she rose and dressed her hair and put on her best frock. She went down to the street door and stood there waiting. She knew that Wall would pass by soon, and she wanted to see him.

He came at last. "'Ullo, Mary-Mary," he said. "'Ow goes it?"

She tossed her head. "Never you mind, Mister Masters," she said. "Yer a sight too free, it seems ter me."

He stared at her blankly.

"Wot's up?" he cried. "I ain't done nothink, 'ave I?"

"P'raps not. But my—my bloke——"

"Your bloke, I didn't know you'd got a bloke."

"Didn't yer! Well, I 'ave. An' 'e sez if yer come prowling around me any more 'e'll put the kybosh on yer quick. So you'd better chuck it."

And she went in and shut the door on him.

Edwin Pugh.

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LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 6.—Why Navajo Joe was Set Free.

Navajo Joe was out of luck. Ordinarily his vagaries are not regarded in Wolfville. His frequent appearance in its single street in a voluntary of nice feats of horsemanship, coupled with an exhibition of pistol shooting in which old tomato cans and beer bottles perform as targets, has hitherto cited no more baleful sentiment in the Wolfville bosom than disgust.

"Shootin' up the town a whole lot" is the name for this singular pastime as given by Navajo Joe, and up to date the exercise has passed unchallenged.

But to-day it is different. Camps, like individuals, have moods—now light, now dark—and so it is with Wolfville. At this time Wolfville is experiencing a wave of virtue. This may have come spontaneously from those seeds of order which, after all, dwell sturdily in the Wolfville breast. It may have been excited by the presence of a pale party of Eastern tourists just now abiding at the O.K. Hotel; gentlemen whom the rather sanguine sentiment of Wolfville credits with meditating an investment of treasure in her rocks and rills. But whatever the reason Wolfville virtue is certainly aroused—a condition of the public mind which makes it a bad day for Navajo Joe.

The angry sun smites hotly in the deserted causeway of Wolfville. The public is within doors. The Red Light saloon is thriving mightily. Those games known to the world as monte, high ball and faro, and which generally engross public thought, are drowsy and dull enough; but the counter whereat the citizen of Wolfville gathers with his peers in absorption of the incautious compounds of the place is fairly sloppy from excess of trade. Notwithstanding the torrid heat this need not sound strangely; Wolfville learning is strongly homeopathic. Wolfville, when it is blazing hot, drinks whiskey.

But to-day there is further reason for this consumption. Wolfville is excited, and this provokes a thirst. Navajo Joe rendering himself prisoner to Jack Moore, rescue or no rescue, has by order of that sagacious body been conveyed by his captor before the Vigilance Committee and is to be tried for his life.

What was Navajo Joe's immediate crime? Certainly not a grave one. Ten days before it would hardly have earned a comment; but to-day, in its spasm of virtue, and sensitive in its memories of the erratic courses of Navajo Joe aforetime, Wolfville has gravely and grimly taken possession of that volatile gentleman for punishment. He has killed a Chinaman. It happened thus:

"Yere comes that prairie dog, Navajo Joe, all spraddled out," says Dave Tutt. He is peering from the window of the Red Light, to which he has been drawn by the noise of hoofs. There is a sense of injury disclosed in the tone born of the awakened virtue of Wolfville.

"It looks like this camp can assoom no airs," remarks Cherokee Hall in a distempered way, "but this yere miser'ble Joe comes chargin' up to queer it."

As he spoke that offending personage, unconscious of the great change in Wolfville morals, sweeps up the street, expressing gladsome and ecstatic whoops and whirling his pistol on his forefinger like a wheel of light. One of the tourists stands in the door of the hotel, smoking a pipe in short, brief puffs of astonishment, and reviews the amazing performance. Navajo Joe at once and abruptly halts. Gazing for a disgruntled moment on the man from the East, he takes the pipe from its owner's horrified mouth and places it in his own.

"Smokin' of pipes," he vouchsafes in condemnatory explanation, "is unelegant and degradin', an' don't you do it no more in my presence. I'm mighty sensitive that way about pipes, an' I don't aim to tolerate 'em none whatever."

This solution of his motives seems entirely satisfactory to Navajo Joe. He sits puffing and gazing at the tourist, while the latter stands dumbly staring, with a morsel of the ravished meerschaum still between his lips. What further might have followed in the way of oratory or over-acts may not be stated, for the thoughts of the guileless Joe suddenly receive a new direction. A Chinaman voluminously robed emerges from the New York Store whither he has been taken by dint of soap.

"Whatever is this Mogul doin' in camp, I'd like to know?" inquires Navajo Joe disdainfully. "I shore leaves orders when I'm here last for the immejit removal of all sech. I wouldn't mind it, but with strangers visitin' us this way it plumb mortifies me to death."

"Oh, well," he continues in tones of weary and bitter reflection, "I'm the only public-sperited man in this yere outfit so all reforms falls nacheral to me. Still, I plays my hand. I'm simply a pore, lone white man; but jest the same I makes an example of this specimen to let 'em know whatever a white man is, anyhow."

Then comes the short, emphatic utterance of a six-shooter. A puff of smoke vanishes quickly in the hot air, and the next census will be short one Asiatic.

In a moment arrives a brief order from Enright, the

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chief of the Vigilance Committee, to Jack Moore. That gentleman proffers a Winchester and a request to surrender simultaneously, and Navajo Joe, realising his fate, at once accedes.

"Of course, gents," says Enright apologetically, as he convenes the committee in the New York Store, "I don't say that Joe is held for beefing the Chinaman sole and alone. The fact is he's been having a mighty sight too gay a time of late, an' so I thinks it's a good, safe play, bein' as it's a hot day an' we has the time, to sorter call the committee together an' ask it's views, whether we better hang this yere Navajo Joe yet or not?"

"Mr. President," responds Dave Tutt, "if I'm in order an' to get the sense of the meetin' to flowin' easy and smooth, I moves we takes this Navajo Joe an' proceeds to stretch his neck. I ain't basin' this yere on no defunct Chinaman, nor nothin' in partic'lar, but lettin' her slide under the general head of being adapted to public good."

"Do I hear any remarks?" asks Enright, "if not I takes Mr. Tutt's very excellent motion as the census of this meetin', and it's hang she is."

"Not intendin' of no interruptin'," remarks Texas Thompson, "I wants to say this: I'm a quiet man myse'f, an' nacheral aims to keep Wolfville a quiet place likewise. For which all I shorely favours a-hangin' of Joe. He's given us a heap of trouble. Like Tutt, I don't make no pint on the Chinaman; we spares him too easy. But this Joe is allers a-ridin' an' a-yellin' an' a-shootin' up the camp till I'm plumb tired out. So I says, let's hang him, an' suggest as a eligible nook thar for the windmill back of the dance hall."

"Yes," says Enright, "the windmill is upholstered for sech plays, an' as delays is aggravatin', the committee might as well canter over right now an' get this off its mind."

"See yere, Mr. President," interrupts Navajo Joe in a tone of one ill-used, "what for a deal is this, I rises to ask, anyhow?"

"You can gamble this as a square American deal," replies Enright confidently. "You're entitled to your say when the committee is done. Jest figure out what cards you needs an' we deals to you in a minute."

"I solely wants to know if I'm in on this ye're play, that's all," retorts Navajo Joe.

"Gents," said Doc Peets, who has sat silently listening, "I'm with you on this hanging. These Eastern sharps is here in our midst. It'll impress 'em that Wolfville means business, an' is a good, safe, quiet place. They'll carry reports East as will do us credit, an' thar you be. As to the propriety of stringin' Joe, little need be said. If the Chinaman ain't good enough, if assaultin' of a innocent tenderfoot ain't enough, you can bet he's done plenty besides as merits a lariat. He wouldn't deny it himse'f if you asks him."

There is a silence succeeding the rather spirited address of Doc Peets, on whose judgment Wolfville has been taught to lean. At last Enright breaks it by inquiring of Navajo Joe if he has anything to offer.

"I reckon it's your play now, Navajo," he says, "so come a-runnin'."

"Why," urges Navajo Joe disgustedly, "these proceedin's make me sick. I shore objects to this hangin'; an' all for a measly Chinaman, too. This yere Wolfville outfit is gettin' a mighty sight too stylish for me. It's growin' that perdadbinged tic'lor it can't take its reg'ler drinks, an'——"

"Stop right thar," says Enright with dignity, rapping a shoebox with his sixshooter. "Don't you cuss the Chair none, 'cause the Chair won't have it. It's parliamentary law if anyone cusses the Chair he's out of order, same as it's law that all chips on the floor goes to the house. When a man's out of order once, that settles it, he can't talk no more that meetin'. Seein' we're aimin' to hang you, we won't claim nothin' on you this time, but be careful how you comes trackin' 'round agin, an' don't fret us. You sabe? Don't go an' fret us none."

"I won't fret you," retorts Navajo Joe. "I don't have to fret you. What I says is this: I s'pose I sees fifty men stretched by committees between yere and The Dallas, an' I never knows a man who's roped yet on account of no Chinaman. An' I offers a side bet of a hundred even it ain't law to hang people on account of downin' no Chinaman. But you all seems sot on this, an' so I tells you what I'll do. I'm a plain man, an' there's no filigree work on me, an' if it's all congenial to the gents here assembled—r.ot puttin' it on the grounds of no miserable author of a laundry, but jest to meet public sentiment half way—I'll gamble my life, hang or no hang, on the first ace turned from the box, Cherokee deal. Does it go?"

Wolfville tastes are *bizarre*. A proposition original and new finds in its very novelty an argument for Wolfville favour. It befalls, therefore, that the unusual offer of Navajo Joe to stake his life on a turn at faro is approvingly criticised. The general disposition agrees to it, and even the resolute Enright sees no good reason to object.

"Navajo Joe," says Enright, "we don't have to take this chance, an' it's a-makin' of a bad precedent as may tangle us hereafter, but Wolfville goes you this time. Cherokee, turn the cards for the ace."

"Turn square," remarks Navajo Joe, with an air of interest. "You wouldn't go to sand no deck nor deal thick an' thin agin perishin' flesh an' blood, would you?"

"I should shore say no," replies Cherokee. "I wouldn't do it for money, an' you can bet I don't do it none when the epeesode comes under the head of relaxation."

"Which, the same bein' satisfactory," says Navajo Joe, "roll your game. I plays it open."

"I dunno," observes Dan Boggs, meditatively caressing his chin, "but I'm thinkin' I'd a-coppered."

The turn proceeded in silence, and, as may readily happen in that interesting device called faro, a split falls out. Two aces come together.

"Ace lose, ace win," says Cherokee, pausing. "Whatever be we goin' to do now, I'd like to know?"

"Gents," announces Enright with dignity, "a split like this yere creates a doubt, an' it's law that doubts goes to the prisoner, same as a bull goes to the first man as ties it down an' runs his brand on to it. This camp of Wolfville abides by the law, and Navajo Joe goes free. However, he should remember this little graze and restrain his methods hereafter. Some of them ways of his is sooicidal, to say the least, an' if he's wise he alters his system from now on."

"So the camp really lose, and this yere person, Joe, goes free?" says Jack Moore dejectedly. "I allers was agin faro as a game; where we all misses it agregrious is, we don't play him freeze-out."

"Do you know, Cherokee," whispers Faro Nell, as her eyes turn softly to that personage of the deal box, "I'd sooner he goes loose than have two bonnets from Tucson." And Cherokee Hall pinches her cheek with a delicate accuracy born of his profession and smiles approval.

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A WHEEL TRAGEDY

"Are you tired?"

"No."

The bright flush on her cheek glowed rosily; there were no signs of fatigue in her eye.

"Glorious spot this," panted the man, as they reached the summit of a hill, "but hard work up the incline."

He was just behind her.

"Halt!" she cried merrily, springing off her bicycle as she held up a warning hand.

"This is too beautiful to pass, we must stop and gaze down on to the world below."

She leant against her machine and surveyed the scene.

He laid his iron steed gently on the soft grass and came close beside her.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"A beautiful earth," she replied, "all peace and plenty."

"Deceptive as everything; nothing is what it appears! Poor earth! what tales you could tell!"

He pointed to the distant villages with a scornful shrug of his manly shoulders.

"What a wonderfully smooth path that is—straight down the hill into the blue lake beneath," she said, her strange eyes following its descent. "We might walk down and dip our hands into the cool water, but it would be such a long way up again."

"The lake is very deep just there. I have read of this place in guide-books, it is called 'The Right Road to Death.'"

"If you ran in the darkness—yes."

The flush died from her face.

"It was not a bad idea of mine," he said, "a honeymoon on 'wheels.'"

"No, indeed."

"A three weeks' spin."

"Only so long? I think a month."

"No, count back. We were married on the——"

She wheeled her machine to a bank with an indifferent shrug of her shoulders, touching the metal lovingly.

"A good compensation for a honeymoon!" she whispered to the unanswering machine.

He followed, and sat beside her on the green slope.

"It is three weeks and two days."

"Really?"

"Yes, why that indifferent tone?"

"Oh! I am so stiff."

"Yet you flew along apparently without an effort! No, things are not what they seem."

"Have you ever heard of the beautiful, bright sulphur-coloured rose?" she asked.

"No."

"It grows in Australia. A lovely flower, but when you pick it to feast on its delights, lo! and behold, a dreadful odour as of decayed fruit."

"We have been married some time," said the man; "our honeymoon is nearly over. Don't you think it is time we discovered our decayed fruit? You spoke once of confessions being made with safety after the fatal knot is tied. If I show up my weak side, will you uncloak yours?"

"Why take it for granted I have one?"

"You are a woman," he replied.

A sudden light flashed in her eyes.

"You are right, it is a compact!"

"To begin with," he said, staring into space, "ideals are all humbug. There is nothing really beautiful in life. It only appears so."

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"Yes," from the woman doubtfully.

"Marriage is only a prosaic routine, after—after three weeks."

"Y—es."

"You think I am a very rising clever man, but it's all nonsense. I talk big because it pays. I stuff the people up, don't you know; they swallow it easily, a crowd always gapes. You can put anything into open mouths."

"I gaped," she vouchsafed thoughtfully.

"*You did*," laughing.

"Don't; it hurts."

Pain is greatly imagination—that sort of pain."

I told you my father was a country squire."

She nodded aimlessly.

"Well, he wasn't. He failed as a tradesman, and died two years ago in gaol."

She bit her lips.

"You lied to me, then."

"I often do," speaking lightly; "don't you ever?"

"Yes," sitting upright, and drawing away from him.

"I say—really—do you mean that?"

She pushed her hat off her rich red hair. He did not like the weird new glitter in her eyes.

"Yes, did you ever wonder why I ran away with you when I had a big house and money?"

"I thought—you—loved me!" he stammered.

"*You*—you were mistaken, who believe in nothing. What of ideals?"

He bit his lip.

"Go on," he hissed.

"I married for freedom—I escaped my tormentors!"

"Your people were kindness itself."

"You saw them at a distance. But the secret that we bury in the bosom of our home is kept from the world, which is not, you see, what it appears! There is a hereditary curse upon us, and I—it is believed—am tainted! The germs are in me, so they say," rising with a mocking laugh. "In a year it may break out, or at any moment," her voice rising with excitement. "I was to be sent to a big white house with iron bars before the windows. Think of it," clutching the handles of her machine, "but this has saved me—this wheel and a man. What a strange combination?" showing her white teeth.

The man looked at her, his face horribly changed.

"Is this a ghastly joke?"

She shook her head.

"Madness!" he muttered under his breath.

The woman started back with a shrill cry. She put her hand to her forehead as if trying to collect her scattered thoughts, and remember what she had said.

"*I told you that?*"

Her voice sent an icy chill through his veins.

"Not exactly. But the curse—tell me for mercy's sake—what is the curse?"

"If it were madness?" she cried, "what then?"

"You had better be at the bottom of the lake," said he.

The sight of the gradually sloping path—growing steeper at the foot—met her fevered gaze.

The wheels were spinning round, she was whirling away towards "The Right Road to Death."

A shout from the man—a wild, triumphant laugh from the woman—ringing with mad mirth!

Then the dizzy sight of the flying red hair, afloat on the wind, the bicycle going at break-neck speed down that dizzy descent, on—on—like a hideous dream, with the blue water ever before her bloodshot eyes, the rushing air on her face, and confused thought in her brain.

Nearer the calm, sweet lake that fearful vision sped, till the terrible climax was reached: a sudden opening of the water, then stillness and peace, the singing of birds, and sound of distant sheep bells.

The lake lay like a sleeping child at the foot of the hill. Could any ghastly secret disturb its endless rest?

W. G.

"Madness!" he muttered, under his breath.

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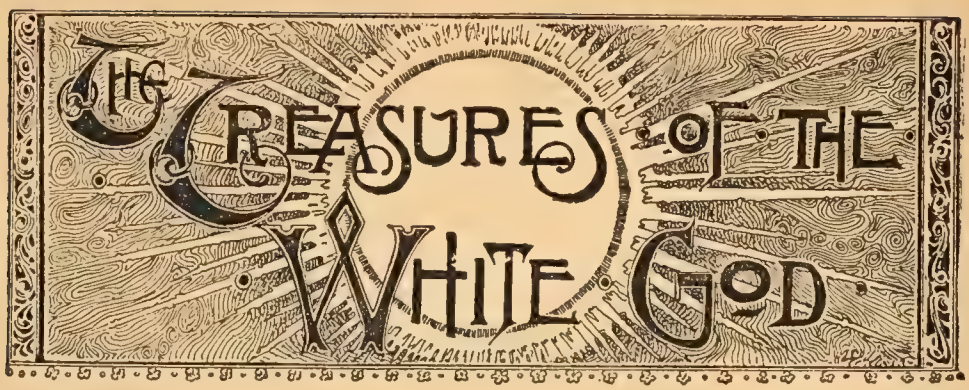

The Story of a Shameful Crime.

CHAPTER XX.

What the Letters Told.

"Impossible! incredible!"—what?

So crushed and depressed was the author of that mystifying sentiment, that it is doubtful if he could have coherently answered the proposition at that moment of intense emotion.

But the papers told. Yes, the documents in his faltering grasp were the cause of all Adrian Burgoyne's strange perturbation, and they could reveal the marvellous discovery his visit to the merchant's house had brought about.

They were three in number—two letters and a newspaper clipping. From the mass of documents littering the desk of Richard Sheldon the pretended physician had selected these, as most closely and vitally bearing upon the case in hand.

Like augmentative disclosures, they had been brought to light consecutively, and in their true, systematic order, and they comprised revelations beginning with a hint, interlarded with a startling, tangible announcement, and terminating in a climax that might well thrill the astounded Burgoyne to mingled wonder, dread and alarm.

They told a story plainly, coherently; they comprised a chronicle, intelligible, illuminating. They may repeat it here far more tangible and clearly than detailed description.

The first of the documents was a hurried scrawl.

It was addressed to Richard Sheldon, and it was signed by Colonel Lytle, two weeks back:

"You have insisted that the girl, Beatrice Ringold, is as innocent and ignorant of our schemes of the cipher alphabet as she pretends to be. I believe so, too, now.

"I have carried out your directions regarding her. She can never injure or unmask us. Why should we injure her? So I have found a new guardian for her, a lady living in the suburbs who operates an asylum for the mildly insane, on a small scale, and in a private way. Here she will be well practically under close surveillance, so that she cannot escape or write to a lover or friends if she would. Here she will remain until our scheme has been carried through—say, in the next two months. Then, I agree with you, that the graceful, generous thing to do with her is to set her adrift, with a couple of thousand, and enjoy the fortune we shall surely soon secure, with no fear of any future trouble from her.

"For the fortune is surely ours! This very day I have found a man, a master of fencing and the fistic art, formerly a native of Mexico. He informs me that the symbols contained in the parchment message that Detective Dean found in Burgoyne's bed are part of a system of sign-writing quite common in Mexico. It is now in his hands. I expect a translation of the same to-morrow."

The parchment message found in Burgoyne's bed! Ah! how that announcement unnerved the pretended doctor! How readily it explained the motive of Colonel Lytle in visiting Patrice—his frantic anxiety for the possession of the cipher alphabet key contained in the Bible cover! She had been right—they had found the lost parchment message, and the startled and appalled Burgoyne could now readily see how.

Patrice was safe. Virtually a prisoner, she would still be treated kindly. The relief experienced by Burgoyne at this discovery allowed his mind to dwell solely upon the other issues of the case in hand.

The second letter was also from Lytle, but it was dated a week later.

"The fortune is ours!" it announced jubilantly.

"To-morrow I will see you personally, and give details, and only write to assuage your natural anxiety. My main trouble has been to blind the Mexican fencing-master so he would get no inkling of the true value of the treasure, or a hint of our plans, and I have given him the parchment message in sections, and blindfolded and hoodwinked him into translating a character at a time, so that by no possibility can he patch it up in its entirety for his own enlightenment or use.

"Here is the entire translation, verbatim."

And here followed, word for word, line for line, sentence for sentence, the exact, the identical translation that Adrian Burgoyne had made of Ralph Ringold's secret, two weeks previous.

"From this you will readily discern," went on Lytle's letter, "that I must go at once to Mexico, to Guayli, to the cave of Bureldo. I have made definite inquiries regarding the place. It is only accessible through petty provinces, torn and distracted with internecine strife. Riot, insurrection, and bloodshed are rife. It is worth a man's life to venture alone in the district.

"Worse than that; once I arrive, the Aztec devotees will resist any encroachment on their territory, and will cer-

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tainly baffle any attempt to remove their most honoured shrine of worship, the oldest idol in Mexico—the ancient, revered object of their superstitious regard—the White God.

"After learning all this, I formulated a prompt plan of procedure. Strategy must be called to our aid. Money and influence must abet our scheme. Observe how finely I work it!

"You must go to the officials of the great Columbian Exposition—the World's Fair. You must represent to them that, as a public-spirited citizen and a lover of the fine arts, you wish to contribute an unique and valuable addition to their exhibits.

"What you propose to do is to send a trusty agent, myself, to Mexico, to gather curiosities and rare paintings. Further than that, I am to make photographs of the relics contained in the great cave of Bureldo, and, if possible, purchase the famous White God, or secure its use for exhibition at the Exposition. They sanction this arrangement, they provide you with letters to the Mexican authorities that will insure me a safe journey through governmental territory. From the Mexican consul in Chicago you also get a strong letter to the monks of the San Miguel Monastery; they will aid me in my plans; their friendly influence will enable me to visit the Aztec cave. I will photograph the idols, and, some fine night, the famous White God is missing. Presto—change! We scurry away with it, we rip it open. Treasure, fortune—a million! The great philanthropist and art collector, Richard Sheldon, Esq., donates a wonderful curio to humanity, and we have scored a triumph, under the guise of a public-spirited generosity.

"This is my plan. You provide the letters, the sanction of the World's Fair, so as to give glamour, a motive and security, to my visit to Mexico. You furnish the influence and the cash; I will hire my assistants, and I pledge you that I will, within two months from date, place in your possession Ralph Ringold's hidden fortune and the famous White God."

What a scheme! what bold plotting! Adrian Burgoyne's brain reeled as he read the letter.

But it was the third discovery he had made in Richard Sheldon's desk that set the coping-stone to the entire structure of fraud.

This was a fresh newspaper clipping, a day or two old, and it read:

A Valuable Contribution.—Richard Sheldon, Esq., a public-spirited merchant of Manchester, has dispatched to Mexico a commission authorised to secure a complete collection of Aztec curiosities. No pains or expense will be spared to secure for the great World's Fair the rarest treasures of a country rich in mementoes of legendary lore. Colonel Lytle, Mr. Sheldon's authorised agent in the enterprise, left for his tour of exploration on the Southern express last evening.

That was the chronicle complete! No need of further detail—no deed to ascertain if Richard Sheldon had gone with his ally and accomplice a part of the way, or, at some fashionable resort, was resting, and awaiting the materialisation of his fond hopes. No time trying to seek Patrice! No use unmasking these plotters to the public!

No; everything—all motives, all energies—must centre on one theme, vital, essential, important——

THE WHITE GOD!

Within its lifeless embrace, behind its baleful mask of stone, reposed the hidden fortune of dead Ralph Ringold.

Once possessed by the schemers, divided, dissipated, Patrice was a beggar.

Lytle had gone for it. Lytle, backed by money and influence, would find priest, fanatic and people ready to give him a warm welcome.

He, Adrian Burgoyne, poor, obscure, a week in the rear, had just eight shillings in cash to pit against the thousands of his rivals in the quest.

Two men sought the treasure! two men knew the secret of its hiding-place.

It was only a question of who could reach it first.

The shock of defeat, dread and dismay began to fade from Burgoyne's face as he reflected over all this.

He sprang to his feet suddenly; his eyes flashed resolutely.

"Somewhere," he spoke solemnly, "Patrice Ringold is thinking of me, praying for me; somewhere along the long road of fraud, cruelty and wrong, a pitfall lies in wait for these iniquitous plotters; somehow I shall yet succeed in my single-handed fight against evil and duplicity. Heaven give me strength in my hour of need! For, failure or triumph, life or death, I start for Mexico and the White God this very hour!"

CHAPTER XXI.

On the Trail.

A tempest of autumn rain was sweeping the street as a lone form sped from the rear of one of the great termini of the Garden City, and made his way rapidly down the bewildering net-work of railway lines, and along the sheltering avenues formed by long lines of trucks.

It was nearly midnight—midnight of the fateful day when Adrian Burgoyne had so fortuitously discovered the plans of his enemies, and it was Adrian Burgoyne himself who now threaded the maze of the station yards, taking the initial step in an enterprise, having its motive the baffling of Colonel Lytle's subtle plans.

"That is it," he murmured, pausing suddenly, and he halted near a luggage car, about the centre of a long train, with engine and red-lantern attached, all ready to start forth on its midnight journey.

Inquiry and investigation had led to his fixing upon this train an hour previous. The discovery that it was ticketed for a point in Texas at the very terminus of a line running nearly to the Mexican border, settled in Adrian Burgoyne's mind the question of transportation. He had determined to get to Mexico, to Guayli, as soon as possible. Without money to purchase a ticket, with no means of readily earning the same, realising that every passing hour was bringing his enemy, Colonel Lytle, nearer and nearer to the cave of Bureldo, to the White God and the precious treasure held within its keeping, he decided to improve the first opportunity that offered to help him on the course pursued by Lytle.

He had been over the route twice before, and was familiar with it. Once arrived at the Mexican border, the rest was simple. Acquainted with the language and ways of the people knowing the topography of the country thoroughly, he would possess a decided advantage over a man entering a strange district for the first time.

Lytle would proceed leisurely and with caution. His semi-official character, as an agent of the World's Fair, would involve considerable red tape; he would waste time cajoling the authorities, making friends with the priests at the San Miguel monastery. Burgoyne planned more speedy progress for himself, once safe on the Mexican soil.

In five days, a week at the most, he had calculated the train would reach the terminus of the line. He had now a little package which represented the last penny he possessed in the world, and it contained food for his journey. The side doors of the vans were doubly locked and sealed, but at one end a little window stood open, and through this, with difficulty he climbed.

Half-way, he started and hurried his progress, for approaching voices warned him. It would not do to be discovered by any of the employés. That would mean a prompt eviction, a further delay. He struggled through the aperture, but in his precipitation the parcel of food slipped from under his coat, where he had stowed it, struck the footboard, and fell between the lines.

The voices were now directly at the side of the truck. Concealment was imperative. He dropped inside on his

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hands, landed on a heap of boxes, and crouched, gasping for breath after his rapid exercise, and listened intently.

"When they pass on, I can recover the parcel," he planned.

Alas! the outsiders had halted. He heard the padlock on the door jangle as one of the intruders tried it.

"All safe?" queried a sharp voice.

"O K."

"Through?"

"Yes."

"See if the ventilating window at the end is all right."

Burgoyne thrilled as a form jumped to the footboard, and a dim outline was revealed against the very aperture he had just penetrated.

"Open," was the terse report.

"Shut and lock it."

Slam—snap! The watcher's heart stood still. A barred wooden grating was dragged across the only avenue of exit from the truck hitherto open to him. He was a prisoner. He could not now reach the lost bundle of food. To all intents and purposes, Adrian Burgoyne was shut in perforce to a long, gloomy journey, with the boxes and bales about him, unless he promptly revealed the fact that he was a stowaway, and missed this extraordinarily fortunate chance of reaching Mexico.

Signals were shouted outside a minute later, followed by shrill whistling.

The wheels began to grind along the lines, then they began to clatter, and the train was fairly started on its southern journey.

Burgoyne had never dreamed that the window at the end of the van would be closed. He had counted on passing through it numberless times at night during the trip, to secure water, when the train stopped. As he grasped the strong iron bars now, as he tried the double-locked doors, he uttered an exclamation of dismayed alarm. It would be difficult to force his way to liberty, unless he chose to call out to the men during a stop. He must remain a prisoner until the train reached its destination.

"I'll try and stand the hunger and thirst until the very last moment," he decided heroically. "It will be just so many miles covered on the route to Mexico. There I must get, and this was the quickest, the only way for me."

He made a pillow of a bale containing carpets or rugs; and, thinking of Patrice, sunk into a profound slumber.

Only the realisation that every hour of progress meant twenty miles accomplished of his journey, sustained the prisoner and enabled him to uncomplainingly endure the monotony, the hunger and the thirst that assailed him all through the next day. He lay down at dark again, with his throat so parched, and the cravings of hunger so intense, that he could not sleep, and at early dawn, the third day of his journey, decided that he had better seek an escape ere he became too weak and overcome to help himself or make himself heard.

He approached the little window and, seizing the bars, set himself to the task of endeavouring to unloosen it. Vain hope, however, and when the train stopped at stations the particular truck he was in halted so far from the station that twice, when he shouted vigorously for deliverance, no one appeared to hear him.

"I *must* get out of this! My throat seems on fire. Water! water! I cannot live without it!" he gasped, almost delirously.

He kicked at a heavy box on the floor of the van, intent on loosening one of its boards, so as to secure an implement to pry the iron bars of the window out of place. He got a long split piece loose finally, but, as he did so, the breakage released a whole row of parcels packed in the box.

With some curiosity, and not a little hope, as a slight savoury aroma pervaded the air, suggestive of food, he took up and inspected one of the packages, tearing off its coverings.

"Food!" he ejaculated, with brightening eyes, as he read on the outside of a light tin box the record of its contents.

The packet and its companion parcels represented a consignment of potted meats. His knife-blade soon had the cover loose. The juicy, palatable morsels glided down his parched throat like nectar.

Ah! that was refreshing, rejuvenating. What new strength the food infused into frame and mind. If he only had water now!

As if in direct and immediate answer to his present wish, a swift patter on the top of the van sounded even above the roaring, monotonous grind of the wheels. He ran to the window. The shower grew to a torrent. He emptied the meat out of the can, and extended this latter as far out of the window as he could reach. It caught as well the drippings of the roof. He caught a pint of the precious fluid; he assuaged his burning thirst feverishly, ravenously. Then filling the can to the brim, emptying a second one of its contents, and filling that as well, he placed both in a safe corner of the truck, and sat down, content, hopeful, certain of food and water in abundance for the residue of his journey.

Five days later the agent at the terminus of the line unlocked the door of the van, drew it open, and passed on to the next one.

When he came back to inspect the contents of the trucks in turn, he found the blue van interior a scene of some disorder, with one broken package, and two cases of meat missing.

"A tramp, a stowaway," he soliloquised. "He must have had a dull ride of it, clear from Chicago. More decent than the average run, too. He's only used what he needed to sustain life, and didn't rip open and steal the balance."

The tramp, the stowaway, Adrian Burgoyne, had slipped from the van unperceived. A decent passenger was he, indeed, for, if any one mental resolve in his mind was powerful and earnest, it was a determination, at the very first opportunity, to remit to the shippers of the case of meat that had sustained his life during his rigorous journey, ten times the value of the rifled cans.

With a light heart and a hopeful eye, at eventide that same day, Adrian Burgoyne stood at the banks of a broad river, and scanned its opposite shores.

He had arrived at the Rio Grande. Beyond lay the promised land, the treasure, the White God—Mexico!

CHAPTER XXII.

In the Quicksands.

"Help!"

The cry rang out in accents of weakness and alarm, and echoed ominously through the rocky fastnesses of a deep gorge situated in the wildest portion of the Guayli district.

It was an involuntary, a hopeless appeal it seemed, and the person who uttered it realised the fact fully.

Through serpent-hunted brake, past forests of bewildering extent and luxuriance adown mighty cañons and across sun-baked plateaus, the daring, intrepid Adrian Burgoyne had forced his way for over three weeks.

Perils by land, perils by water, perils aerial, even, had menaced every foot of his path. The deep streams he was compelled to swim abounded in treacherous quicksands; every thicket seemed to hold a beast of prey; snakes menaced, bearing death inevitable in the blighting tips of their forked tongues; an oppressive air, dense with miasma, or breeding cyclonic disturbances that, later, nearly swept him to destruction, seemed ever present. The last few days of his arduous journey towards Guayli had been rife with terrors that turn the hair grey, and prepare men to face the ordinary dangers of existence with reckless indifference.

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Twice had he fallen into an ambush of the rival armies. Once, captured, he was condemned to be shot as a spy, escaping by a daring dash for liberty, that was accompanied by the sharp tattoo of half a hundred rifle balls, as they ricocheted among the rocks in a grim dance for his life, and now, fairly in sight of Guayli, with less than thirty miles between himself and the cave of Bureldo, the intrepid Englishman had stumbled into a trap in which it seemed the leagued forces of Nature were bent on dragging him down to destruction, with no trace left to tell how he had died.

It was nearly evening, and, coming to the banks of a bright, sparkling stream, he decided to cross it, and investigate the source of a thin, curling pillar of smoke among the timber, which apparently marked a camp or a habitation, on the opposite shore. He forded and swam the stream in safety, and with little difficulty. He started across a sandy waste to gain the thicket lining the river. Then, of a sudden, he paused, glanced down at his feet, and as suddenly sprang forward, as if a thousand serpents were grouped about the spot.

In vain! More deadly, menacing and certain than the swiftest "rattler," snakes of sand, ominous, grasping, deluding, had began to encircle his feet. He sank a foot, dragged himself free, stumbled, fell, sank deeper, and then, with a cry of horror, wavered ankle-deep in the meshes of a monster that shifted, rolled, enveloped him, with the sickening, deadly motion of a devil-fish.

"The quicksands!"

He gasped the words, a cold void of horror chilling heart and brain. He essayed to drag one foot free. An inch of upward progress attained, the disturbed particles only formed a new and stronger suction. He was knee-deep now.

Sinking—sinking—sinking! His breathing grew husky, his eyes terrified.

Waist-deep! He had ceased to struggle. Effort was in vain. In frenzied appeal, one shrill shriek rang from his bloodless lips.

"Help!"

The echoes of his voice rang adown the cañon, clear and resonant, and then came back to him mocking, tantalising, unanswered.

Adrian Burgoyne gave himself up for lost. He cast one last, lingering look at the fair sunlit scene, his soul reached out in memory for one final thought of the woman he so devotedly loved.

Then he closed his eyes. The deadly quicksands were heart-high now. In fancy, the tickling particles answered the wild throbbings of the excited life-pulse.

"Caramba—the sands!" Burgoyne opened his eyes with a shock; a faint soul of hope illumined his stricken face.

Peering from a rock was a man, Mexican in garb, harsh, repellant of feature, cunning, cruel of eye.

In Spanish he had jerked forth the startled hail; in Spanish, tumultuous, incoherent, Adrian Burgoyne replied:

"Help! It is the quicksands! A rope—a chain!"

"No, this!"

The Mexican disappeared behind the rock, but only for a moment. When he reappeared in view he was staggering under the weight of a great log, part of the dead trunk of a tree.

He poised it across the rock. Then, apparently, regardless of the consequences, so long as the end desired was gained, he gave it a violent push.

It shot forward, barely missing the head of the uncomprehending Burgoyne. It fell directly in front of him.

"Catch to it—hold firm!" shouted the Mexican.

"Ah!" panted Burgoyne hopefully, "I understand now."

He threw both arms about the log. There he clung tenaciously.

He could feel the shifting sands about his form, but they dragged him down no longer. The resistance offered by the log, with either end lying outside the unstable circle of quicksand, was an anchor of security.

The Mexican again disappeared. This time he was absent for fully an hour.

"He surely cannot mean to desert me!" soliloquised Burgoyne anxiously.

No, he reappeared at last. A man as villainous looking as himself was with him. They bore a stout rope, and within ten minutes, with the strong cable tied under his arms, Burgoyne was dragged to terra firma in safety.

Inert, exhausted, he lay on the greensward for some time unable to move, bestowing grateful glances upon his rescuers. They were men, judging from their looks, whom he would not have cared to meet in a lonely mountain path, but they had saved his life, and his heart went out to them thankfully.

As soon as he was able to walk, the Mexican assisted him through the timber, arriving finally at the source of the smoke that had attracted Burgoyne's attention—a rude hut. Near by, half-a-dozen dispirited looking half-breeds were digging and sluicing near a mine opening, a great hulking ruffian of a fellow directing their labour with the aid of a cowhide whip.

The Mexican treated Burgoyne as if he was some regal guest, providing him with an ample supper, a comfortable bed, and an appetising breakfast in the morning.

From subtle, guarded inquiries, Burgoyne ascertained the exact position of the monastery and the cave.

The Mexican and the companion who had helped to rescue Burgoyne listened politely to all the latter had to say, and as politely replied to all his questions, but there was a latent secretiveness, a sinister, watchful token in their manner, as Burgoyne started to leave them with renewed expressions of his gratitude and full appreciation of their kindly offices.

"I will say adieu," he remarked, taking each warmly by the hand; "but some day I shall return, to thank you more substantially for your great goodness to me. Adieu, señores."

"One moment!" spoke the owner of the hut, stepping forward and blocking Burgoyne's exit.

"Ay, you go not this way, surely," interpolated his companion, lounging against the open doorway, so as to completely block the exit.

"Eh? why! what is the matter?" queried the bewildered Burgoyne.

"The señor is a just man, I hope?" insinuated the Mexican gravely.

"I hope so, too."

"And yet he leaves us with only hollow thanks!"

"They are sincere, believe me!"

"They count for little, where bread is scarce and money precious."

"Oh!" exclaimed Burgoyne, with an ingenuous smile—"the señor wishes pay for his services?"

"Was it not earned?"

"Truly, doubly."

"Then?——"

"I am sorry to say I am penniless. I have not a single coin."

The Mexican scrowled darkly.

"And yet the stranger partook of our scanty stock freely?" he said.

"In our country—" began Burgoyne.

"I care not for your country!" interrupted the Mexican hotly. "I must have my pay!"

"At some future time."

"No! Now!"

Burgoyne was amazed at the sudden change in his host. From the smiling, open-faced friend he had become transformed abruptly into the sordid, scheming tyrant.

"It is useless to speak of recompense to a pauper!"

"I must be paid!" affirmed the Mexican decidedly.

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"Then allow me to return in a week—in a month. I shall have ample means."

"No! Now!"

"Yes, now, by all and every means!" piped in the Mexican's companion.

"Impossible!"

"Not at all."

"But, if I have no money——"

"There is still a way!"

The Mexican had taken out his knife, and, a sinister expression on his swarthy face, he toyed with it menacingly.

"What is the way, may I ask?" queried Burgoyne.

"The señor must remain!"

"What good will my detention do you?"

"The señor must work."

Burgoyne gave a vivid start.

"In other words," proceeded the Mexican craftily, "according to the law of Mexico, a debtor must pay his obligations in labour when he has no money with which he may liquidate the indebtedness. The peon law holds good in this case. The señor must remain. He shall work in the mine under the overseer. He becomes my property—my slave!"

(*To be continued.*)

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WHICH SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Now let me see how plain I can make what I have to say, for it's no use writing things unless they are understood.

Here is a house five storeys high—of course, not counting the cellar. Suppose the owner offered you the privilege of living, rent free, either in the cellar or on the topmost floor, and nowhere else, which of the two places would you choose? Is your answer ready? "Yes, all right," you say. Well, keep it between your teeth a minute while we run over this short letter from Mr. Simpson.

"In the spring of 1891," he says, "I began to feel weak and out of sorts, and could not imagine what had overtaken me. I was tired, weary, and heavy. All the snap, life, and energy seemed to be gone out of me. My head felt dull and thick, and ached a good deal; there was a foul, bitter taste in my mouth, and I was constantly spitting up a tough, slimy phlegm that gathered in my throat.

"My appetite fell off, and the little food I took punished me terribly, and I was never easy until I had vomited it up, and after doing so I felt weak from the want of nourishment and the strain of vomiting. As the malady obtained a firmer hold upon me I began to be troubled with palpitation of the heart. It throbbed and thumped until I could scarcely get my breath.

"Then a short, dry cough fixed upon me, which shook me greatly, and made me sweat until beads of perspiration stood upon my face. At night my sleep was broken by frightful dreams, and I arose in the morning unrefreshed, and even more exhausted than after a day's hard work.

"After two or three months of this kind of suffering I became dreadfully nervous and excitable. Noises and sounds which in a state of health I should not have noticed were now unbearable. I was strangely apprehensive of evil without any cause that could be reasoned out or defined. I had no desire for company, I wanted to remain in silence by myself. I was now so weak I could barely crawl about, and if I walked out a little way I was obliged to stop and rest here and there.

"My eyes were sunken, and I was so worn down and emaciated that I lost all hope of ever getting back my flesh and strength. *In very truth I grew so low-spirited that I often wished myself dead.*

"In this low and wretched condition I continued for nine months, *during the whole of which time I was away from my work.* I had a doctor attending me, but his medicine had no effect.

"In December (1891) I determined to use a remedy which had cured my wife of indigestion and weakness five years before—namely, Mother Seigel's Syrup. I got a supply from the Co-operative Stores, Crosby, and began taking it. In a week's time I found great relief. My appetite revived, and what I ate agreed with me and gave me strength. Continuing to take the Syrup I grew better and better. Gradually, but certainly, all the pain and nervousness wore away, and I got back to my work as strong as ever. And the fact that I have not lost a day's work through sickness since that time shows how radical the cure was. (Signed) William Simpson, Crosby, near Maryport, Cumberland, October 10th, 1894."

Now we are ready for your answer. As between the cellar and the topmost floor you choose the latter, of course. Well, the human body is a house of many storeys, and the topmost is the best. When we are in good health we live up there. When indigestion and dyspepsia (as in Mr. Simpson's case) seize us, we move down into the cellar. We are *low* in spirits when we are ill in body. Then, when Mother Seigel's Syrup has cured the disease, we move up again. You appreciate the illustration. All right. The moral? Very plain. *Prevent* the disease by a timely use of the remedy, and you will always live where there is daylight and fresh air.

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